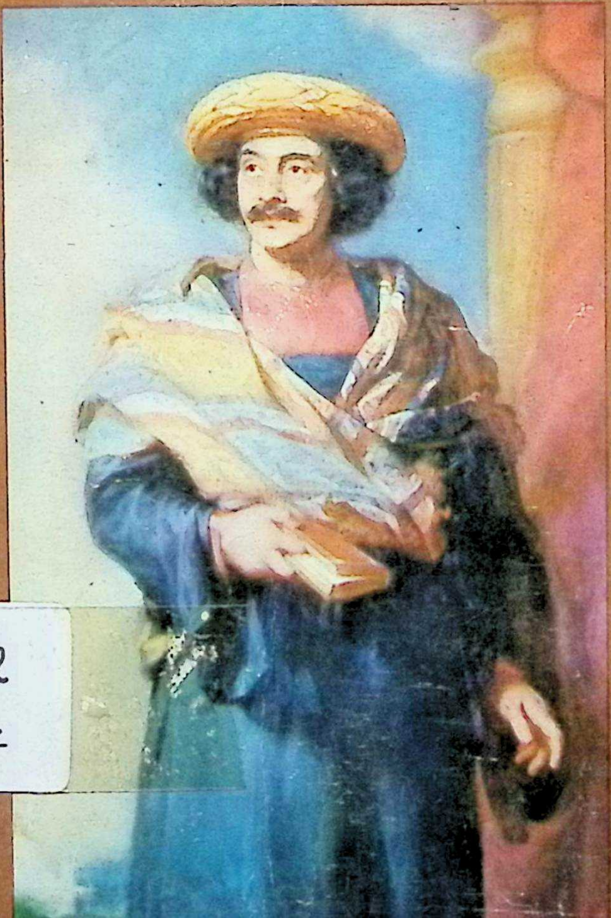
ORIENT PAPERBACKS

Raja Rammohun Roy

India's great social reformer

Jamuna Nag



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RAJA RAMMOHUN ROY

India celebrates in 1972 the birth centenary of Raja Rammohun Roy, one of her greatest and most effective social reformers.

Rammohun, who was born in Bengal in 1772, soon emerged as a leader of stature and an uncompromising crusader against the existing social ills. He launched a vigorous attack on the barbarous practice of *Suttee* — the cruel custom which compelled the hapless widows to consign themselves to flaming death on their dead husbands' pyres. Moreover, Rammohun's contributions in the fields of education, religion and culture are of momentous significance.

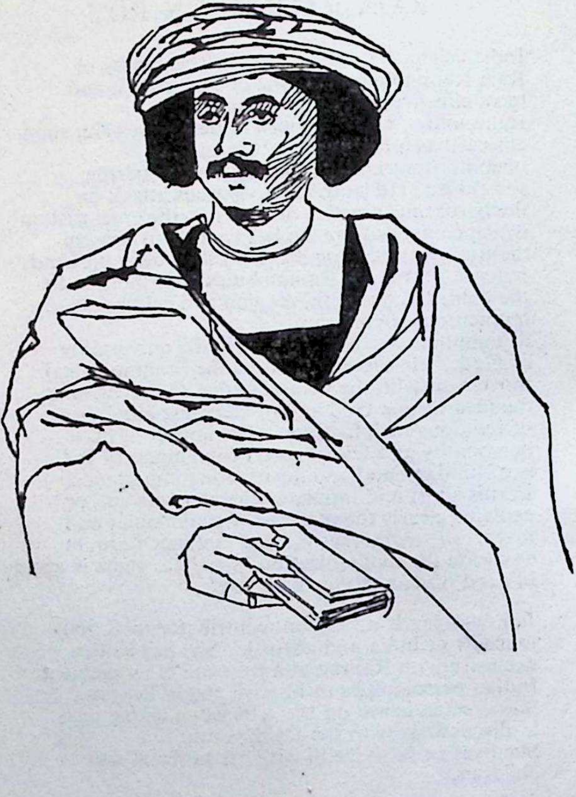
Rammohun strongly believed in the universality of God. He therefore started the Brahmo Samaj movement with the twin objective of propagating the idea of one God and of cleansing Hinduism of religious malpractices. The impact of his personality and teachings on contemporary India is of fundamental and far-reaching importance.

In this short and intimate biography the author explains clearly the message of Rammohun and reveals the many reasons that motivated him to advocate the modernization of India. India is again in need of Rammohun's message.

Jamuna Nag is a frequent contributor to various journals in India and abroad. She has written extensively on Rammohun Roy and other eminent Indian personalities in English and in Bengali.

She is often heard on the AIR when taking part in discussions with the Delhi youth.

She lives in New Delhi with her husband and children.



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India's great social reformer

RAJA RAMMOHUN ROY

Jamuna Nag

ORIENT PAPERBACKS

Dedicated to the sacred memory of
my father Sri Mohit Kumar Mukhopadhaya *and*
mother Shrimati Jyotirmoyee Mukhopadhaya
who have left for me the inspiration for
all creative work.

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Raja Rammohun Roy

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PREFACE

I FEEL I owe it to my readers to acquaint them briefly as to how I came to acquire an interest in the life and work of Raja Rammohun Roy.

I was born and brought up in pre-war Rangoon, Burma. Ours was a secular and cosmopolitan home where educated and cultured people of every religious denomination were received with hospitality, and where education, learning and creative activity were greatly respected.

My early acquaintance with Rammohun was through my maternal grandfather, Pandit Sitanath Tattabhusan, who lived in Calcutta. During my first encounter with him, he asked me to sing some songs from the Brahma Sangeet. I first sang one of Tagore's songs and the other, which I did not know, was composed by my grandfather. He then told me that Brahma Sangeet contained hymns by Rammohun who made its first compilation. These songs, however, penetrated my soul until they became my playmates and they have ever since became my companions.

The admiration and love that thus began for Rammohun was sustained by me through reading about this great man. Our frequent visits to Calcutta deepened my interest in the personalities connected with the Bengal Renaissance of which Rammohun was the most towering representative.

During one of these visits we met Tagore at Santiniketan and my interest in the resurgent Bengal grew even more.

When I began writing articles about the Indian Renaissance and its major contributors, I felt that the story of Raja Rammohun ought to be re-told for the benefit of younger generations. My book, therefore, is not intended to be a critical commentary; I have tried to narrate the story of Rammohun for those to whom he has receded in the historical past. I have steered clear of controversies surrounding Rammohun and my objective has been to portray the man and underline his message which, I believe, is of continued relevance to India and the world.

But for the sustained help of my friends, this book could not have been written. My special thanks to Mr. C. R. Banerjee, Mr. B. R. M. Rao and Mr. Mani who typed the manuscript. Due to limitations of space I cannot thank individually all these friends in Delhi and Calcutta who have helped me to complete the many-splendoured life of Rammohun.

JAMUNA NAG

CONTENTS

Preface 5

1. The Legend 9
2. The Heretic Brahmin 12
3. The Challenge of Religion 26
4. Education and the Dawn of New Age 44
5. Crusade against Suttee 61
6. Foundation of a Faith 88
7. The Champion of Liberty 108
8. Protest against Exploitation 126
9. Voyage to England and the Last Days 141
10. Anecdotes: Rammohun the Humanist 166
11. Impact on Posterity 177

ONE

THE LEGEND

Drive away the trivial fears
Of the countrymen O Lord.
The dread of social persecution
The rulers' oppression
The fear of death.

—TAGORE

WHEN THE spray of sunlight falls on the faded grey pillar, the aged widows in Radhanagar are reminded of a tragic legend.

The desperate moanings of a helpless woman echo through the air. Alokmanjari, dazed and grief-stricken, falls over the lifeless body of her husband, Jagamohan, son of Ramkanto Roy. A large crowd has gathered to attend the funeral and witness the rituals of the cremation. They eagerly watch Alokmanjari. She curls up with agony. "I am faithful only to you," weeps the widow, her eyes fixed on Jagamohan. Relatives try to console her. They misquote from the Hindu scriptures that a widow must die with her husband in order to be a faithful wife! "Let me be consumed by the fire that devours my life's companion," Alokmanjari pleads with tears rushing down her pale cheeks. Her red-bordered white sari is half-fastened; her hair untied. The vermilion marriage mark shines for the last time on the centre parting of her hair. Her glances shift rapidly from an unknown fear. She murmurs the lines of the sacred verses and knocks her head against the bamboo frame to which is tied the corpse. She calls out to her family deity. She repeats her prayers. "It is the Suttee that follows her husband," the neighbours proclaim. "Sahamaran ! Sahamaran is the Dharma of the widow. Salute our scriptures, our ancestors, and the Brahmin priests who have shown the right path for the loyal widow. She who follows the husband is the blessed one." The burning ghat is surging with spectators – they comment incessantly from all corners.

There bursts upon the scene, Jagamohan's younger brother, indignant and outraged. "Stop ! Stop !" he cries out to the crowd. "Sister-in-law, you will not be burnt alive," he says, and raises his hand to stop the priests. She looks up. But she is confused.

The crowd turns hostile. "That outcaste again ?" shouts one of the members of the family. "What does he know about our religious laws ?"

"Let my brother die in peace ! The dead do not wish to take the living along with them. Save the widow, and let my brother's soul rest in peace," persuades Jagamohan's brother. The stately figure walks up briskly towards the funeral pyre and holds the hands of the terror-stricken woman.

"Let me perish with him. What shall I live for now ? Let me go," the widow pleads with him.

"You will save our girls from this cruel custom. You will serve the country by saving other widows."

"No, no, they will call me unfaithful. If I sin against the Sastras, I shall be punished by God."

"Leave her alone!" The priest gives his verdict. Jagamohan's brother is pushed aside by the angry Brahmins.

Alokmanjari is tied to the funeral pyre which is lighted in the traditional way. The glowing flames rise high in the shape of a pagoda, the weather-beaten logs roll down one by one. Suddenly a woman's shriek is heard from amidst the blazing pile. Pieces of forest wood crack and burst at intervals, and the wanton breeze reaches a shrill note. "I cannot bear the flames any longer, my eyes are blinded by the heat," Alokmanjari pleads for freedom.

"Release her, release her!" The anxious voice demands once again. The man is stopped. He turns his eyes from the horror. The desperate groans of the widow resound everywhere, but she is silenced in a few seconds. Bamboo sticks are pressed on her from all sides, her screams are drowned by the noise of the drums and cymbals rising in a crescendo. The drummers play with great abandon. "Glory, glory to the loyal wife," proclaim the mourners and disperse in haste. They discuss the grandeur of the scene.

Today the worn-out grey pillar, more than a hundred and sixty years old, speaks for the man who vowed to abolish the gruesome custom of Suttee.

TWO

THE HERETIC BRAHMIN

> *"When I was born,*
> *From all the seas of strength*
> *Fate filled a chalice,*
> *Saying this be thy portion,*
> *child, this chalice."*
> —EMERSON

RAJA RAMMOHUN ROY,* son of Ramkanto Roy of Radhanagar (Bengal), was born of 22 May 1772. Ramkanto was a modest zamindar, a man of mild manners, and forthright in his official life. For three generations, the Roys had held fairly responsible posts under the Mohammedan rulers in Murshidabad. The zamindary was given to them as a reward for loyalty in service. Ramkanto rented a number of villages from the Maharaja of Burdwan, which unfortunately led to constant friction. Ramkanto was unjustly harassed by the Maharaja who frequently indulged in litigation making Ramkanto's later life extremely unhappy. He took to regular prayers and *namkirtans*, and lived a retired life. The Maharaja nourished a sort of grudge against the Roy family and much later in life tried to take revenge on Rammohun by taking him to court with false claims. Ramkanto was a Vaishnava in faith, whereas his wife Tarini Devi hailed from Sakta stock. But she embraced the Vaishnava faith and shouldered the responsibilities of a large household run according to strict orthodox tradition. Elaborate rituals and pomp were a part of worship as that was the fashion of the day; prejudice and superstition naturally haunted the members of the family. Tarini Devi, better known as Phulthakurani, was a strong personality; she influenced her son to undergo spiritual discipline. Rammohun was earnest about his prayers and in his early childhood had great regard for regular worship. Whatever was taught to him in the name of God, he took seriously, and never tried to escape the religious duties and penances. Rammohun, when attending the *Jatras* (popular plays), was so deeply moved by the characters taking part in the legendary plays that he wept profusely during the touching scenes.

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*Roy was the title shortened from Roy—Royen. The family name was Bandhopadhya (Banerjee). Rammohun's great-grandfather's name was Krishnachandra Bandhopadhya.

Ramkanto was ambitious about his son's education. In his childhood, Rammohun studied Persian in the village in addition to undergoing a course in Bengali and Sanskrit. But the elementary village education was not satisfying to the young boy, and Ramkanto realized that his son was exceptionally mature for his age. Moreover, he had a remarkable memory. The child was so full of curiosity and keenness that he was sent to Patna for further studies in Persian and Arabic. Ramkanto as a father showed courage in deciding to send the boy so far away from home, specially when Rammohun was about nine years old. In

Patna Rammohun spent a number of years during which he came into close contact with some distinguished teachers. He was given a solid foundation in the Koran by learned maulavis of the rational schools of thought. The pupil was not allowed to plough through the difficult texts, but was taught to think independently. Teachers with a liberal outlook made an extraordinary impact on the child. The keen student that he was, Rammohun grasped the fundamentals at a very early age. The scholars in Patna had obviously initiated him into the study of Arabic translations from Euclid and Aristotle. Rammohun was fascinated by the mystic poetry and philosophy of the Persian sufis. Whatever the young scholar heard was fresh in his mind; he noted the vast difference between the maulavis at Patna and those in his own village. The basic conception of monotheism gradually dawned upon his mind. He came to admire the works of the Mutazalis and Muwahudins. The Hindu worship of idols and images opposed to the principles of monotheism struck him as irrational. The form of Hinduism then practised in the society appeared to him as lacking in depth.

Rammohun returned home from Patna with a positive leaning towards monotheism. The proud father was pleased to see his son's increased passion for theological subjects, but he was perturbed when he realized that Rammohun's views had undergone a great change. As he grew older, Rammohun started expressing his apathy to the rituals practised at home. His young heart suffered from numerous conflicts which he could not sort out easily. But he spoke against idolatry and refused to worship the family deity. It was least expected that a rebel should grow up in the peaceful home of devout parents. They were shaken by the strange utterances of the *enfant terrible*, so tender and yet so stubborn. Why did he criticize the irrational fears and prejudices treasured by his ancestors? His curious enquiries sounded most precocious. He was not shown any sympathy.

Ramkanto and his wife were deeply concerned and humiliated when they found their son indifferent to the traditional background. The family of zamindars and their orthodox neighbours anticipated calamity and disaster when Ramkanto failed to control his son's passionate resistance to idolatry. The adolescent was rebuked when he questioned the very roots of Hindu worship, no one thought it sane to discuss the matter. But his conviction against idolatry increased despite the opposition of the family. As he could not conceal his feeling of vexation, he voiced his positive views openly and would not take part in the ostentatious celebrations which, he believed, lacked in fundamental truth. The great expectation of the parents was shattered. Being deeply attached to his scholarly son, Ramkanto was not averse to having occasional discussions with him, but the enthusiastic youth, already stimulated by the rational scholars, was often argumentative. He was fired by both curiosity and resentment, and was ready with pertinent retorts. To this the entire household reacted with disapproval. Rammohun was defiant. He abhorred the very idea of being married twice even

Before he was an adult; But since the Brahmins in those days enjoyed the privilege of marrying any number of times, the orthodox parents found nothing unnatural in marrying their son thrice. When Rammohun's first wife died very young, his father got him married the second time. Within a year he was married again. He lived with two wives, and resented polygamy from his youth. Rammohun looked down upon child-marriage with contempt.

At the age of sixteen Rammohun's ideas were taking more concrete shape. He wrote an essay on idolatry and superstitions prevailing in Hindu society. His pungent remarks provoked his father. His mother was deeply hurt. "I would rather not see the face of my son who does not bow down to my deity," remarked Tarini Devi in her usual dogmatic tone. "I cannot live under the same roof with a son who is disrespectful to my religion," commented the angry father.

The rift between the father and son increased so rapidly that Rammohun had to leave home for a short period of time. Having been seriously rebuked by his father, he undertook a long trek across the Himalayas. The prospect of a rough journey mostly on foot did not frighten him. He went up to Tibet where he came into contact with the Lamas, the superstitious priests in charge of the temples. The custom of worshipping the Lamas was repulsive to him. As he visited the temples the crude forms of worship conducted by the Lamas shocked him. He was thoroughly disgusted with the primitive rituals observed by the Buddhist monks and their blind followers. His sharp criticism of the Lamas created great displeasure amongst them for which Rammohun nearly lost his life. But he was given protection by some kind-hearted ladies whom he remembered throughout his life. Now, being familiar with the abuses of Hindu worship as well as the distorted form of Buddhism, Rammohun became more resentful towards idolatry. The travel which Rammohun undertook opened up vistas beyond the four walls of a conservative home. His desire to break away from the narrow surroundings was fulfilled partially. He met several pilgrims and devotees who also had endured long and strenuous treks in search of truth. The company of the spiritually inspired Sadhus made him aware of the concept of a Universal God to whom every devotee could bow down with reverence. The feeling of a universal brotherhood enthralled his young soul. A quest for the Divine Supreme Ruler of the Universe seized him. His urge to reach the roots of Hinduism was therefore compelling. Soon after, Rammohun went to Benaras. His wives accompanied him. He took up part-time work and studied the Hindu scriptures under the learned pandits. Radhaprasad, Rammohun's eldest son, was born in Benaras in 1800.

While going through the rigours of studying the original texts in Sanskrit, Rammohun was deeply impressed by the Hindu scriptures taught by erudite scholars. This intensive study of the scriptures cleared his doubts. What interested him most was the Upanishad. The Upanishad appealed to him for its monotheism which he identified with the conception of the Divine Supreme. How could he accept anything but the worship of one God? He was now face to face with the Supreme Being present in all religious faiths based on Perfect Truth. Now that it was clear to him that the truth in every religion lay in the worship of just one formless God, he could fully uphold the Vedanta. Rammohun became more and more aware of the fundamental unity in all world religions — Hinduism, Islam, Christianity and Buddhism — the Unity which is based on the worship of a universal God. Rammohun's heart was drenched with the realization of the Creator whom he saw in every man, in every devotee.

Ramkanto passed away in 1803. Rammohun shifted to Murshidabad having taken up a government job. While in Murshidabad, he published *A Gift to Monotheist* (Tuhfat-ul-Muwahiddin). This Arabic-Persian booklet was an open protest against idolatrous elements in all established religions. Its importance lies in the fact it presents Rammohun's earliest reactions to misrepresentation of all true religions, and lets out his pent-up emotion against religious hypocricy and social abuses. Although some authors have treated this publication casually, it has a special significance. This particular text explains his faith in both monotheism and universalism and is the earliest "document" against idolatry and ritualism.

In analysing the thesis presented in *A Gift to Monotheist,* we come to the following conclusions :

(1) That Rammohun realized the truth about

the one Supreme Being;

(2) That he gained a rational approach to religions and religious experiences; and

(3) That he emphasized the necessity of a comparative study of religions.

The scholar was vehemently against blind faith or belief; he condemned superstition and the legends of supernatural powers. He laid stress on inductive reasoning and was against abstract theories and vague generalizations.

At about this time, Rammohun took up a job in the Revenue Department of the East India Company. He worked in Bhagalpur, Ramgarh and Jessore before he joined Mr. John Digby at Rangpur as a Dewan to the Collector in 1809.

From all accounts it seems evident that during this period of appointment (1809-14) Rammohun enjoyed the privilege of meeting some interesting persons who later became his close friends. He found some of them sufficiently communicative, and could exchange his religious views with them easily. In the midst of a stimulating atmosphere Rammohun was able to devote himself to various studies and discussions. Being directly under a sympathetic officer like Mr. Digby, he had facilities to learn the English language and study the English character. His enthusiasm was great; he made full use of the opportunities. He was about twenty-two when he started the study of the English language. His capacity for hard work and his power of assimilation were very much higher than those of an average scholar. He took full advantage of the facilities offered by a man like Mr. Digby.

Rangpur at that time was a cosmopolitan centre. Amongst the citizens, there were Hindus, Muslims, Christians and Jains. Rammohun made a study of the Kalpa Sutra with the help of Jain pandits. He also came into close contact with an erudite Tantric scholar, Hariharananda Tirthaswami, who happened to be his childhood friend. Rather inclined towards an ascetic life from youth, Hariharananda, had later become a Sanyasi. Rammohun was inspired to study the Tantric scriptures under Hariharananda. The Jains and Muslims found in Rammohun a rational scholar, a broad-minded Brahmin and a sociable man. His bold views, however, created some hostility amongst a certain group of Sanskrit scholars, amongst whom Gourikanto Bhattacharya was a prominent figure. Being a Dewan in the Judge's court in Rangpur, Gourikanto became aware of Rammohun's popularity. He tried to discredit the modern thinker. Orthodox men accepted Gourikanto's criticism and tried to oust Rammohun from the intellectual circle. A group of malicious men who were critical of Rammohun tried to prejudice people about his standards of rectitude in public and private life. As he was outspoken in his views, Rammohun did not have many friends to support him. His own relatives were equally prejudiced. But he was self-sufficient. Fortunately, he found a handful of broad-minded, educated men amongst his supporters who were aware of the ignorance and superstition then prevalent.

Although Rammohun's father had divided his property amongst his sons, Tarini Devi tried her best to disinherit Rammohun by calling him an atheist and a heretic. Tarini Devi along with other relatives filed a suit against Rammohun and there was much mud-slinging against him for several years. But Rammohun was in a good post. His sense of dignity gave him distinction. He managed his own expenses without going into counter-litigation until he was blackmailed by more than one enemy.

The years from 1809-14 were spent fruitfully in Rangpur by Rammohun Roy. From Mr. G. S. Leonard's *History of Brahmo Samaj* we get an unbiased view of how Rammohun was respected for his competence. "His proficiency in zamindary accounts and land surveying, his acquaintance with all the cunning and dishonest devices of the Amins and Amlaho in furnishing false accounts and statements," and also "the practical reforms he suggested regarding the ascertaining of rightful ownership and descriptions of land" prove what sharp commonsense and high standards Rammohun had with regard to his work. He enjoyed the challenge of hard labour and the responsibility that he was shouldering under Mr. Digby and his associates.

During the period of his stay at Rangpur, Rammohun took a lively interest in the political development of England in Europe. He used to read all the journals and newspapers that Digby received from England. He also read various scholarly essays and reviews, works of renowned Western political philosophers and liberal thinkers. We learn from Mr. Digby that Rammohun was attracted by the political liberalism prevailing in Europe at that time.

It is quite possible that the discussions held at Rammohun's residence in Rangpur laid down the foundation of the future Brahmo Sabha. Biographers consider his stay at Rangpur very significant. It was here he was planning to write the elaborate exposition of the Vedanta Sutra which he later published in 1815.

A particular event that shook Rammohun around 1811 was the death of his brother, Jagmohan, whose wife became a Suttee. Rammohun tried to persuade her to abstain from the tortures of the custom but in vain. Nagendranath Chatterjee relates in *Mahatma Rammohun Roy* (in Bengali):

> When however she felt the flames she tried to get up and escape from the pile, but her orthodox relatives and the priests forced her to die, while drums and brazen instruments were loudly sounded to drown her shrieks. Rammohun unable to save her and filled with unbearable indignation and pity, vowed within himself then and there, that he would never rest until the atrocious custom was rooted out....

Rammohun on several occasions roamed round the burning ghats to stop the mourners from forcing the widow to be a Suttee. He was ignored in most cases, but he was adamant. Some of his friends took an active interest in explaining the atrocity of the custom and requested the people to give it up. Rammohun even organized groups of men to be present at the cremations to persuade the mourners to save the widow's life.

The abolition of Suttee became his mission for which he started agitating from 1812 onwards. He realized that at the root of this inhuman custom lay deep ignorance, a closed mind and a selfish interest to destroy the widows who were considered burdens on the society. In his own words:

> So far have pandits been infatuated in attempting to give the appearance of propriety to improper actions that they have even attempted to make people believe that a rope may remain unconsumed amidst a flaming fire, and prevent the members of a body from being dispersed from the pile. Men of sense may now judge the truth of the reason to which you ascribe the practice of tying down widows. All people in the world are not blind, and those who go and behold the mode in which you tie down women to the pile, will readily perceive the truth and falsehood of the motives you assign for the practice.

The ordeals of the reformer had already begun. Rammohun's non-conformity with regard to religion and religious ceremonies antagonized his mother to such an extent that she turned out to be one of his adversaries in later years. The orthodox mother did not hesitate to accuse her son unjustly of "dishonesty." Although Ramkanto Roy had left a portion of his property to his son, Tarini Devi did not hesitate to disinherit him, and deprive him of his right to property. This explains how easy it was to hate a man who supported new ideas or liberal views. Rammohun was labelled an outcaste and treated with suspicion. However, "evidences succeeded in establishing that Rammohun was not living jointly with Jagamohan and the property enjoyed by the former was absolutely self-earned."

At one point Tarini Devi's antagonism became so fierce that Rammohun was forced to move out from his ancestral house in Langalpara. He built a house on the burning ground at the village of Raghunathpur and shifted there with his family. Ostracized by his nearest kin, condemned by his contemporaries, Rammohun was at times a lonely man. But his conviction helped him gather enough courage and physical stamina to take up the gigantic task of introducing a series of reforms which, he believed, would change the entire vision of his countrymen. The sick society groaned under caste rigidity, corruption and ignorance. Rammohun staked his life and honour to modernize the intelligentsia who, he firmly believed, would awaken the masses from their stupor.

An interesting trip Rammohun undertook under Mr. Digby was his visit to Bhutan along with Mr. Krishnakanto Basu. Rammohun along with Mr. Basu was sent as an envoy of the East India Company to Bhutan which was then a part of Tibet. This was to settle the boundary disputes (or border issues) between the kingdoms of Bhutan and Cooch Behar. Rammohun had visited the Cooch Behar-Bhutan border in the company of Mr. Digby in 1812 and perhaps earlier in 1809. In the official letters Rammohun was mentioned as the Dewan. He has also been mentioned as the ambassador. Much later in life Rammohun proved to be a suitable diplomat, for his Bhutanese mission of 1815 might have given him a good reputation and invaluable experience in dealing with foreigners. Very few men have the education to tolerate another man's point of view. Rammohun was broad-minded, and was drawn to mankind so naturally. Mutual respect, he believed, was the secret of good relationships and harmony.

THREE

THE CHALLENGE OF RELIGION

"Entering my heart the ray
tells me
When this heavy curtain is
removed
Will be revealed the endless,
timeless, spaceless
Original Light."
—TAGORE

AFTER DIGBY left India in 1814, Rammohun settled in Calcutta. His resignation from the office of East India Company gave him time and opportunity for serious studies; moreover, he was eager to serve his countrymen. A mature scholar, he now turned a sympathetic eye towards the burning problems facing the society.

> He was (writes Miss Collet) now in the prime of manhood. A majestic man, nearly six feet in height and remarkable for his dignity of bearing and grace of manner, as well as for his handsome countenance and sparkling eyes.... Thick clouds of ignorance and superstition hung over all the land; the native Bengali public had few books, and no newspaper. Idolatry was universal, and was often of a most revolting character: polygamy and infanticide were widely prevalent and the lot of Bengali women was too

> often a tissue of ceaseless oppressions and miseries, while as the crowning horror, the flames of the Suttee were lighted with almost incredible frequency even in the immediate vicinity of Calcutta.... He did not, however, confine his activity to one or two subjects. His alert and eager mind ranged with keen interest over the whole field of contemporary life, and on almost every branch thereof he left the impressions of his individuality. Alike in religion, politics, literature and philosophy, his labours will be found among the earliest and most effective in the history of native Indian reform.

It is interesting to note how neatly he presented the summary of the Hindu scriptures usually misunderstood by the people. Rammohun's approach in matters of controversy had a technique, rather a methodology highly characteristic of him. He did not reject the authority of the Sastras, but maintained that man's spiritual conviction must not be formed merely on the evidence of the Sastras but also on the application of his common sense and rationality. Obviously, he followed the Mimamsa method for arriving at the truth. By starting with a particular piece of evidence found in the Sastra, one doubts its validity and then questions its authenticity. A re-examination of the issue comes later, and finally you arrive at a conclusion.

In 1815 Rammohun translated the Vedanta Sutra into Bengali. In 1816 he translated the Vedantasar into Bengali and Vedanta into English. In the same year he translated the Isha and Kena

Upanishads into Bengali and English, and in 1817 the Katha and Manduka Upanishads into Bengali. These were the first efforts made for translating the Vedanta and Upanishads into Bengali and English. In 1823, Rammohun wrote a brochure entitled *The Encroachment on the Rights of the Hindu Females* in which he demanded that Hindu women should have rights in the properties of their fathers and husbands. In 1827 he edited and published the Sanskrit work *Vajrasuchi,* a treatise directed against the institution of caste.

Very often Rammohun was denounced as being hostile to Hindu Scriptures. This was grossly wrong. He interpreted the scriptures with considerable humility. Before we enter into the details of Rammohun's discussions of the Hindu scriptures, we are struck by his logical line of thinking. But his attempt to rationalize the Sastras, far from being appreciated, was regarded with suspicion. The orthodox pandits and the erudite scholars who upheld the traditional belief that the Sastras could not be rejected even partially, naturally regarded Rammohun as an atheist. But Rammohun was a religious man. He was keen to uphold the truth in religion. The traditionalists did not appreciate his free thinking.

Rammohun could not accept the superfluous frills and the frail logic behind the dogmatism of the priests. Very soon he came into conflict with the orthodox section. Having studied the essence of the Hindu scriptures, he became determined to present a fresh interpretation in his translations. This aroused antagonism amongst the orthodox intelligentsia. A group of learned scholars challenged him. As he was least interested in condemning anyone, Rammohun appealed to the people to purify and elevate their minds. The introduction and comments on his works of translations were aimed at arousing the leaders of the society against basic ignorance and mass illiteracy. The author distributed his works freely to his countrymen hoping that they would be able to understand the basic truth in their own religion. His idea was to acquaint the people with the original scriptures which did not support the crude forms of idolatrous worship. The practice of treating the idols as human beings, feeding and clothing them like children did not help elevate the mind. Rammohun objected strongly to the Brahmin priests interpreting the worldly desires of the Gods and Goddesses.

In his own words:

> I deemed it requisite to oppose the arguments employed by the Brahmins in defence of their beloved system. Most earnestly do I pray on that the whole may sooner or later prove efficient in producing on the minds of Hindus in general, a conviction of the rationality of the believing in and adoring the Supreme Being only, together with a complete perception and practice of that grand and comprehensive moral principle 'Do unto others as ye would be done by.'

The gist of his comments is easy to follow, as he was most keen to draw the fundamental truth from all religious scriptures. Since Hindu scripture was most abused by his own countrymen, he first took it up with the Brahmin pandits. His systematic arguments against the malpractices of the Hindu society produced a countrywide explosion. Nevertheless, a small circle of friends understood his reasoning, and appreciated his goodwill. They tried to find out why he took a firm stand. They were willing to exchange their views. In 1815, Rammohun started a small society; Atmiya Sabha (Society of Friends) for the purpose of theological discussion and meditation. It met once a week, when recitation of Hindu scriptures and chanting of theistic hymns became a regular feature. The hymns were first written by Rammohun himself, but others composed a few more later. At a very early stage Shiva Prasad Misra recited the verses, and Govinda Mala chanted the hymns. Atmiya Sabha was an association of people with faith in the One Supreme Being. The meetings were not held in public but attended by a few close friends and admirers of Rammohun. Amongst them Dwarkanath Tagore, Brajmohan Mazumdar, Haladhar Bose, Nandakishore Bose and Rajnarain Sen were the earliest members. Hariharananda Tirthaswami, Rammohun's childhood friend whom he met at Rangpur, also joined him in Calcutta. A sincere friend and a man of learning Hariharananda came closer to Rammohun, for he also believed in the worship of one God. A Tantrist by faith, he found no difficulty in following the proceedings as he followed the principles of Mahanirvan Tantra. It is noticeable that on one side Rammohun had

Tirthaswami to support his views, and on the other David Hare, a teacher of the Anglo-Hindu School who later became one of his closest friends.

Hare stood by Rammohun in his crusade against the practice of Suttee. As Rammohun's intimate colleague he supported the cause of liberal education. Together Sir Edward Hyde East, David Hare and Rammohun laid down the foundation of the Hindu college in 1817. Rammohun was left out of the committee merely because of prejudices expressed by the orthodox section.

Hariharananda from his youth was inclined to be a sanyasi. But Rammohun and Hariharananda had similar views on religion, and had several occasions for thrashing out their differences. Being a liberal thinker and well-versed in Tantrism, Hariharananda had much in common with Rammohun. Since the days of Rangpur they had occasions to be together, and later in Calcutta, Hariharananda participated in the gatherings of the Atmiya Sabha. His progressive views with regard to social reforms inspired Rammohun a great deal, specially when he was campaigning against Suttee. Hariharananda's original name was Nandakumar Vidyalankar. The childhood friends joined hands once again.

Meanwhile Digby had returned to England. Rammohun corresponded with him as an old friend would. Digby reprinted the two of his English works entitled *The abridgement of the Vedant* and *Kena Upanishad* in 1817. His preface gives an idea of his admiration for Rammohun:

By pursuing all my public correspondence with

> diligence and attention as well as by corresponding and conversing with European gentlemen, he acquired so correct a knowledge of the English language to be able to write and speak it with considerable accuracy.

Rammohun's letters to Digby explain the scholarly spirit with which he took up the translations.

> I, therefore, with a view of making them (Hindus) happy and comfortable both here and hereafter, not only employed verbal arguments against the absurdities of the idolatry practised by them, but also translated their most revered theological work, namely Vedant into Bengali and Hindusthani and also several chapters of Veda in order to convince them that the unity of God and absurdity of idolatry are evidently pointed out by their own scriptures....

Soon after, Digby returned to India in November 1819 and joined the Bengal Civil Service. From 1821 to 1822 he was posted in Burdwan. Rammohun used to meet him frequently. After Digby returned to England in 1824 he fell ill and died. A highly cultured Englishman who sincerely wished the welfare of this country, his death was a heavy loss to his friends in India.

Meanwhile Rammohun became deeply involved in his campaign against the Suttee and other social malpractices. Rammohun's publications drew attention at home and abroad. A good many scholars were struck by his intellectual ability, specially by his command of logic. His works had churned the critic's mind, he was now destined to face the angry philosophers.

Sankara Sastri, a lecturer in English in Madras Government College, challenged Rammohun to a polemic. Rammohun published *A Defence of Hindu Theism* and made it clear that the orthodox scholars were doing harm to the people by giving sanction to their belief in the mythological stories of Gods and Goddesses, the belief which did not stand to the test of reason.

The head Pandit of the Government College of Fort William, Calcutta, took a firm stand against Rammohun's progressive ideas. Mrityunjaya Vidyalankar published both in Bengali and English serious tracts attacking Rammohun's views. *The Vedanta Chandrika,* written by Mrityunjaya Vidyalankar, brought out a series of criticisms against Rammohun which Rammohun effectively answered in another publication. *The History of Brahmo Samaj* written by Pandit Shivnath Sastri gives glimpses of the discussions as well as the heated controversies between them. The detailed academic discussion based on technical issues makes Rammohun's book a scholarly piece of work, while the bitterness expressed by Mrityunjaya betrays bad taste. Rammohun never lacked in balance or eloquence even in polemical writings.

Although Rammohun's theological writings were creating hostility amongst the orthodox, his logical arguments, based on deep scholarship, in reply to Mrityunjaya's criticism aroused healthy curiosity amongst the more liberal section of the people.

A well-versed pandit from Madras, Subramanya Sastri, publicly challenged Rammohun to a debate. The debate took place in Biharilal Chote's house in the presence of a large gathering led by Radhakanto Dev, a big zamindar and a Sanskrit scholar of repute. The debate between Subramanya Sastri and Rammohun was long and intense. Rammohun carried the discussions with the true spirit of a rationalist. His self-confidence, cold reasoning and thorough knowledge cleared many doubts hovering over the audience. But Subramanya Sastri proved to be dogmatic and was swayed by emotion; he could hardly make any impression on the gathering. Rammohun won the day. His reply to Sastri was published in 1820 in four languages, Sanskrit, Bengali, Hindi and English. The English translation is entitled *An Apology for the Pursuit of Final Beatitude Independently of Brahmanical Observance*.

At the time when Rammohun was engaged in controversy with the Hindu orthodoxy, challenge came from another quarter – the Christian Missionaries. He studied the Bible – both the Old and the New Testaments – from original sources for which he had to master Hebrew, Greek and Latin. Once he was sure of his ground, he brought out a tract entitled, *Precepts of Jesus – the Guide to Peace and Happiness: Extracted from the Book of the New Testament Ascribed to the Four Evangelists*. The publication of the tract provoked serious resentment among Christian Missionaries. According to them, the rendering was inadequate and omission deliberate.

Rammohun had not the faintest intention of offending the believers in Christianity. Though he expressed his doubts about the authenticity of the Bible, he desired its wide reading. In his own words :

> I feel persuaded that by separating from the other matters contained in the New Testament, the moral precepts found in that book, these will be more likely to produce the desirable effect of improving the hearts and minds of men of different persuasions and degrees of understanding....

The Christian missionaries did not appreciate Rammohun's broad view. *The Friend of India,* an organ of the missionaries, started spitting fire at him. Dr. J. C. Marshman, who at one time had shown considerable regard for Rammohun, referred to him as "an intelligent Heathen whose mind is as yet completely opposed to the grand design of the Saviour's becoming incarnate." The Baptist Mission of Serampore in a group resented the tract, least realizing the fact that Rammohun regarded Jesus as one of the greatest spiritual teachers.

When *The Friend of India* made ruthless accusations, it merely expressed the animosity developing amongst the missionaries. The offensive language of the missionaries expressed through the columns of *The Friend of India* hurt Rammohun deeply. In reply he came out with another tract entitled *An Appeal to the Christian Public in Defence of the Precepts of Jesus by a Friend to Truth.*

He resented being called a "heathen" by the missionaries. To quote from him:

> These moral precepts, separated from the mysterious dogmas and historical records, appear to the compiler to contain not only the essence of all that is necessary to instruct mankind in their civil duties, but also the best and only means of obtaining the forgiveness of our sins, the favour of God and strength to overcome our passions and to keep His commandments.

He raised the question regarding the method of conversion adopted by the Christian missionaries. Rammohun was against conversion, but acknowledged the contributions of the missionaries.

> From what I have already stated, says Rammohun, I hope no one will infer that I feel ill-disposed towards the Missionary establishments in this country. This is far from being the case. I pray for their augmentation and that their members may remain in the happy enjoyment of life in a climate so generally inimical to European constitution....

Again and again Rammohun acknowledges the greatness of Jesus whom he regarded as the greatest humanist, the epoch-making guide of moral elevation.

Rammohun published in 1821 the *Second Appeal.* He completely ignored all authenticity of the miracles of the New Testament, which he would put on a level with the marvels of Hindu Mythology. He stated that he did not believe in the superfluous writings appearing either in the Hindu scriptures or in the New Testament. His criticism was never without fairness, his mind was always open.

As regards the theory of Atonement which Dr. Marshman emphasized, Rammohun repeatedly acknowledged Christ as the Redeemer, Mediator and Intercessor with God on behalf of his followers. He declared that he regarded Trinitarianism as essentially polytheistic.

The unity of God was the main point in Rammohun's argument, but some of the missionaries misunderstood his interpretation. He had close contact with Reverend William Yates and Reverend William Adam who were both impressed by him. Since the controversy was taken up as a theological debate, the *Second Appeal* was published in 1821. But when Rammohun was ready with his *Third Appeal,* Dr. Marshman was already a prejudiced man. He brought out a detailed criticism of the tract in *The Friend of India.* The attitude of the missionaries by now had become doubly stiffened, for they failed to take a sympathetic view of Rammohun's comments, and refused to print the *Final Appeal* in their own press.

Rammohun decided to publish the *Final Appeal* from his own Unitarian Press. Dr. Marshman continued to bear hostility towards Rammohun and resented his repeated observations. Dr. Marshman was orthodox in his outlook and failed to view the discussion objectively. Rammohun, while publishing his *Final Appeal* in the *Brahmanical Magazine*, included in it an article entitled "Reasons of a Hindu for Rejecting the Doctrine of Christanity" written under the pen-name Shiva Prasad Sharma. He was able to uphold the teachings of Vedanta against the attacks on it by the Missionaries. Failing to give logical arguments against Rammohun's objection to Trinitarianism, Dr. Marshman remarked that "Hinduism owed its origin to the Father of lies." This uncharitable remark by one of the foremost missionaries distressed Rammohun who, as a matter of principle, stood for dignity in a controversy. "We must recollect that we have engaged in solemn controversy," he wrote, "and not in reporting abuse against each other." *The Indian Gazette* praised Rammohun's unquestionable integrity and the uniform good temper with which he argued.

The controversies which Rammohun had started with a spirit of benevolance unfortunately turned into a deprecatory drama. But Rammohun was admired by Reverend William Adam, a Baptist Missionary who was sympathetic towards the Unitarian Association. Adam's open declaration in favour of Unitarian Christianity created an uproar; the missionaries were reluctant to hold him as one of the members of their organization. Rammohun was the guiding spirit of the Association founded by him in 1821. In the aims and objects of the Association he stated that:

> And whatever therefore has a tendency to diffuse the benefits of education to destroy ignorance

> and superstition, and fanaticism, to raise the standard of intellect, to purify the theories of morals and to promote universal charity and practical benevolence will be considered as within the scope of their design.

In spite of the fact that Rammohun was treated rather shabbily by the Christian Missionaries, his writings were considerably appreciated in Europe and America. Abbe Gregoire, the Bishop of Blois mentioned in a pamphlet in French: ". . . he distinguished himself more by his logical mode of reasoning than by his general views."

Rammohun, in reply to a letter to Dr. T. Rees of London, acknowledged receipt of a parcel of books. He wrote: "I cannot but be proud of the honour which the committee have conferred upon me in reprinting my compilation of *The Precepts of Jesus and the Two Appeals in its Defence.*" The treatises on Christianity and Vedanta had reached America where Thoreau and the Transcendentalists were much impressed by his writings.

In the course of time, Adam, Yates and Rammohun formed a group to translate the Gospel afresh into Bengali, because they were not satisfied with the translations of Carey who included all the mythological details. Carey was one of the pioneers of book-publishing in India. His main area of interest was the translation of the Bible in Indian languages. His Serampore press offered enough opportunity for printing books which the ordinary man would be interested in. Mythological details played a significant role in the literature produced by the missionaries. Indian mythological themes were also translated from Sanskrit sources into Bengali for popular reading.

Rammohun's controversy with the Christian missionaries convinces us that he believed only in the universal God. His sorting out the true teachings from Hinduism, his findings from the mythology of the New Testament, his rejection of Trinitarianism, the forceful discernment, expressed nothing but his faith in the One God. Having argued that he believed in the unity of God, the natural outcome of his spiritual quest was the unity of religions. Max Mueller admired him as "the first man to effect a synthesis of East and West." At the bottom of all the long-drawn struggles lay his magnificent idealism. Rammohun dreamt of universal harmony through progressive reforms, mutual tolerance and justice through mutual respect. Man's freedom in a civilized society therefore was to be regarded as a fundamental right.

The forming of the Calcutta Unitarian Committee accelerated Rammohun's effort to work with people of the same faith but belonging to different communities. The object of this Committee was an all-round improvement in the condition of the people of the country.

The Committee consisted of a few Indian friends and sympathisers who regarded Rammohun as their guide. A few Europeans and civil servants also joined. Amongst the Indian members, Dwarkanath Tagore, Prasanna Kumar Tagore, Radha Prasad Roy were active workers, as they offered services for the welfare of the general public. Rammohun's humanitarian urge found an excellent outlet. The Anglo-Hindu School, under the auspices of this Committee was exclusively supported by Rammohun. The Unitarian minister, Adam, depended a good deal on Rammohun who carried out his duties with a keen sense of responsibility, worthy of the founder.

Let us note that Rammohun's interest in a Unitarian Church incidentally created a wrong impression on people's minds. Many believed him to be a Unitarian Christian. Rammohun's reverence for Jesus and his broad outlook were often misinterpreted when the Anglo-Indian Unitarian Chapel was started in 1824. Unitarians from France, Transylvania and Kirkland, and the ex-President of the Harvard University were present at the sixth anniversary in 1831. The Unitarians were hoping that Rammohun would ultimately be converted into Christianity and also help the church in converting many more Indians into Christianity. When it became clear that Rammohun was emphasising on Hindu Unitarianism, Adam was bitterly disappointed. Adam had all along been harbouring the notion that Rammohun was preaching Unitarian Christianity. That his friend was not inclined to embrace Christianity came as a blow to Adam. The numerous essays and articles Rammohun had published mainly through the Baptist Mission Press, gave an impression that he was pleading for Christianity, and for the Christian Church. Obviously, Adam misunderstood Rammohun from the very beginning. But he was not bitter. Rammohun's elegant and

7835

guage, lofty ideas, impeccable honesty touched him deeply even from his earliest days of friendship. However, Adam failed to see how intensely Rammohun discussed the Hindu scriptures, also Buddhism and Islam. That each religion at different times helped him shape his universal outlook was not clear to Adam. Rammohun's rejection of religious dogmas helped to restore his confidence in his old friend.

The Baptist Mission could hardly see eye to eye with a man so exceptionally conscientious, as well as practical. As the orthodox Hindus refused to tolerate critical comments on the Hindu scriptures, so were the missionaries reluctant to accept Rammohun's radical views. His writings which tried to clear doubts in the minds of the leaders of the society apparently had adverse effects; Ram mohun's message of benevolance was never fully understood by either the traditional Hindus or the Christian missionaries. He had to fight single-handed, both against the Hindu and the Christian dogmatists.

Mr. William Adam and Rammohun, in spite of all differences, remained very good friends. Rammohun provided future security for Mr. Adam's family as he considered Adam to be a deserving missionary. This shows that Rammohun never nourished any grudge against anyone.

With the publication of his article, "Honourable Suggestions to His Countrymen who Believe in the One True God," Rammohun's controversies with the Trinitarian missionaries came to an end.

Rammohun was never spared by his co-religionists. While engaged in controversies with the missionaries, he was attacked by a defender of the traditional Hindu faith who brought out a booklet entitled *Chariprasna* (Four questions). It was nothing but a long tirade of personal attack and abuse. But with a quiet sense of humour Rammohun wrote in reply a short tract *Pathya Pradana* (Medicine for the Sick) which was published in 1823. Rammohun, called a destroyer of religion, took a dignified attitude towards the neurotic critic. He reminded him that when the physician administered medicine to a sick boy, he did not lose his temper when the boy kicked and screamed. His medicine which was a compound from the Sastras should be the right reply to all the complaints of the sick.

Rammohun's dissension with the Christian Missionaries and his controversies with the Hindu orthodoxy have been a subject of misunderstanding among the Christians and the Hindus even to this day. But a close examination of his polemical writings shows that here was the man who took his stand purely on the ground of reason; the man who was extremely tolerent without being pliable when it was a matter of principle. A Brahmin by birth, brought up in an orthodox household and subjected to unkind criticism by his contemporaries, Rammohun earnestly believed in changing the outlook of the educated class on whom depended the progress of the country.

FOUR

EDUCATION AND THE DAWN OF NEW AGE

As your knowledge increases, your moral
principles will be fortified, and rectitude
of conduct will ensure happiness.
—HENRY DEROZIO

REFORMS WERE imperative at a stage when the country needed a systematic form of liberal education. Rammohun suggested some practical changes aiming at definite objects of education, new ideas, and progressive norms. The world of cruel corporal punishment for the child had to be discarded.

The negative background provided no constructive purpose. There was no challenge, no feeling of achievement. Patience and stoicism were the only results of such methods of boredom. Rammohun was in favour of creating a more congenial atmosphere in the schools where a pupil could come closer to the teacher. Discipline and respect should arise from within, he had little faith in forcing them from outside.

The obvious strategy of the East India Company Government on the other hand was not to disturb the Hindu and Muslim masses, neither educate them properly, nor help them cultivate a desire for enlightenment and general knowledge. The Tol pandits and the maulavis who taught in the villages were however given full support by the British. Warren Hastings had established the Calcutta Madrassah in 1781 to promote the cultivation of Arabic and Persian languages and the Mohammedan Law. The next institution was the Benaras Sanskrit College opened in 1792 by Mr. Jonathan Duncan, a genuine well-wisher of the Indians. Duncan took the initiative to eradicate infanticide. In Benaras he abolished the inhuman custom of new-born girls being killed immediately after birth. Although he was in favour of supporting the harmless traditions of the Hindus and the Muslims, he was aware of the fact that lack of good teachers, schools, and proper textbooks created a colossal gap. Several reports were registered by various officers, but no one was able to convince the Company government that the "natives" were deprived of an all-round education.

In 1811 Lord Minto submitted a minute in which he expressed deep concern about a painfully monotonous routine which did not inspire the boys at all. In spite of a thorough training in the elementary steps in Sanskrit and Persian, the boys were completely out of touch with any stimulating work. At the Fort William College, which opened in 1800, Bengali was taught by men like Mrityunjaya Vidyalankar, William Carey, Ram Ram Basu and Haraparasad Roy. The books published at that time were full of Sanskrit and Persian words.

Bengali language or prose had not taken any positive shape. The publications of the Baptist Mission Press nevertheless became useful to some extent; a small variety of mediocre books were also available. The general public insisted on getting their children educated in Westernized schools; the consciousness of a broader education had dawned at last. The demand for Anglo-Indian schools had just increased when a number of schools were opened in the vicinities of Calcutta under the patronage of Sherburne, Martin Bowle, Drummond and Peters. Some of these schools were fairly popular with the affluent middle class. But the foundation of the elementary schools was considerably weak as the method of teaching was simply odd. A number of English words were taught to the boys who immediately started feeling superior. In the conversation between a Bengali and an Englishman, there was no use of grammar; and no proper sentence. A certificate was given by the English teachers to an Indian boy, according to the number of words memorised by him. Those who could memorize several pages of a dictionary would be rewarded for the achievement. An English word pronounced together with the Bengali synonym impressed the parents. It was considered a great honour to be able to remember such countless words (e.g. Guru-teacher. Goru-cow). Lord Minto realized the tragedy of the situation and criticized the absurdity of the method of a teaching which totally lacked in any incentive. The Governor-General stated:

> It is a common remark that Science and Literature are in a progressive state of decay among the natives of India.... The abstract sciences are abandoned, polite literature neglected, and no branch of learning cultivated but what is connected with the peculiar religious doctrines of the people.... Unless Government interferes with a fostering hand, the revival of letters may shortly become hopeless for want of books or of persons capable of explaining them. I would accordingly recommend that a college be established in Nuddea and in the district of Tirhoot.

In order to get fresh light on this subject, it is interesting to note that the British Orientalists were deriving great pleasure from learning Sanskrit as a classic. Scholars like Colebrooke, H. Wilson, Mr. Shakespeare and Sutherland were much devoted to the study of Sanskrit. They, therefore, discovered the fatal mistake of keeping the Tol pandits as the keymen for teaching advanced Sanskrit. In fact, the scholars gradually aroused the curiosity of the Governor-General, and helped to reinstate the teaching of Sanskrit on a higher level.

An annual grant of a lakh of rupees was kept for advanced study in sciences and literature. But during the years 1814-23 nothing much was done. When the Committee of Public Instruction was formed, it encouraged the maulavis to continue their traditional method of teaching which gave rise to bitter disappointment.

At about the same time in 1815 Rammohun Roy settled down in Calcutta after retiring from Government service. He was keen to build the educational institutions, and immediately got acquainted with the drawbacks of the educational system. He came into contact with David Hare who had come to India as a watch-maker but in course of time became very closely associated with the welfare of the natives of India. David Hare joined the Atmiya Sabha which was formed in 1815 under the leadership of Rammohun and his close associates. In fact, he understood the problems of the people better than many Indians. Naturally Rammohun and Hare came closer to each other day by day. Both of them felt that the country was suffering from an educational catalepsy. A broad education was perhaps the only antidote. This could only be achieved through the help of understanding teachers, and properly run schools following a modified pattern of syllabus. Curiously enough, a demand for English education was growing faster amongst the intelligentsia. The proposal to start a college, where both Oriental and Western education could be given simultaneously, was discussed at Sir Edward Hyde East's house. It is wrong to say that Rammohun was is no way connected with the foundation of the college. At the beginning he had given the idea to David Hare who immediately took it up. It was the orthodox section which would not include him in the committee. Naturally he made way for the conservative group which dominated the Governing body. Radhakanto Dev's disapproval of Rammohun is revealed in Sir Edward Hyde's letter. The first meeting took place on 14 March 1816. The idea of the Mahavidyalaya

—the Hindu College was sponsored by both David Hare and Rammohun and supported by Rev. William Adam and Dwarkanath Tagore. A good many liberal-minded members of the Atmiya Sabha responded spontaneously. The college was formally opened in 1817. After having a long discussion with Rammohun, David Hare took up the issue with great enthusiasm, but he least expected that the critics of Rammohun could be so intolerant.

Sir Edward Hyde East was then the Chief Justice of the Supreme Court. He wrote a letter to Mr. J. Harrington, a judge in England, which referred to the meeting taking place at his residence. The letter explained the narrow-mindedness of the orthodox leaders. Even at an open meeting they could not help expressing their personal dislike for Rammohun.

> An interesting scene has lately been established here [relates Sir Edward] which shows that all things pass under change in one season. About the beginning of May, a Brahmin of Calcutta (Rammohun Roy) whom I knew and who is well-known for his intelligence and active interference amongst the principal natives, inhabitants and also intimate with many of our own gentlemen of distinction called upon me and informed me that many of the leading Hindus were desirous of forming an establishment for the education of their children in a liberal manner as practiced by Europeans of condition; and desired that I would lend them my aid towards it by having a meeting held under my sanction

> .... The meeting was accordingly held at my house on 14th May, 1816 at which fifty and upwards of the most respectable Hindu inhabitants of rank or wealth attended, including also the principal pandits; when a sum of nearly half of a lakh of rupees were promised, I found that one of them, in particular a Brahmin of good caste, and a man of wealth and influence was mostly set against Rammohun Roy.

Radhakanto Dev was responsible for canvassing against Rammohun, because several orthodox Hindus refused to participate in any organization with which Rammohun was connected. Rammohun, however, with a magnanimity worthy of his noble character, withdrew from the management of the proposed institution. Though Rammohun was practically laid aside, he never failed to desire its success and progress, and thus set a rare example of selflessness. He gathered enough inspiration to take up many more constructive works and concentrate on the improvement of the schools which would be attended by children of poorer parents as well. David Hare looked upon Rammohun as his closest colleague, a wise adviser and a large-hearted reformer.

In 1822, Rammohun started the Anglo-Hindu School under the auspices of the Unitarian Association. He bore almost all the expenses himself. The school was run efficiently under the supervision of David Hare and Reverend William Adam. The school imparted free tuition to native boys, and ran successfully as long as Rammohun was in this country. It had on its roll bright students like Devendranath Tagore, Ramaprasad Roy (Rammohun's second son) and many more who became distinguished in both academic and spiritual pursuits. Science was taught in Bengali in the Anglo-Hindu School. In his Bengali weekly *Sambad Kaumudi,* Rammohun published an article appealing to the Government for the establishment of a school that would impart free instruction to the children of the poor Hindus. During the year 1821-24, several articles on scientific subjects and general knowledge such as "Echo in Acoustics", "Properties of the Magnet", "Behaviour of Fishes", "Description of a Balloon", were written by Rammohun. He also wrote textbooks in Bengali, on grammar, geography, astronomy and geometry. But when the Company Government decided to establish more Sanskrit schools run by pandits, Rammohun protested strongly.

Rammohun foresaw the danger of establishing only Sanskrit schools all over the country. He felt that the British rulers did not really care to impart sound education. They would tackle the problem superficially if left to themselves. Their main interest was based on plausible patronage and commercial exploitation. The feeling of benevolence exhibited frequently was merely to keep the people docile and dependent. The Baptist Mission on the contrary cherished the desire to convert: and for that purpose, sponsored publication of books, both in Bengali and English. They had taken up philanthropic work together with evangelical propaganda. Translations of Hindu mythological works were distributed along with the Bible. Though not many in number yet the few foreigners who were not obsessed with national or personal self-interest, appreciated Rammohun's point of view, and were willing to help him sincerely. It was easier for Rammohun to convince men like Hare and Adam not to keep the countrymen in complete darkness. An exchange of ideas with the wider world would embellish the prospects of education. Rammohun therefore wrote to Lord Amhearst what he thought would be best for the Indians. The letter made a remarkable impact on the British educationists and the Indian literati.

> The establishment of a new Sanskrit School in Calcutta evinces the laudable desire of Government to improve the natives of India by education.... when this seminary of learning was proposed we understood that the Government in England had ordered a considerable sum of money to be annually devoted to the instruction of its Indian subjects. We were filled with sanguine hopes that this sum would be laid out in employing European gentlemen of talents and education to instruct the natives of India in mathematics, natural philosophy, chemistry, anatomy, and other useful sciences which the Nations of Europe have carried to a degree of perfection that has raised them above the inhabitants of other parts of the world.... We now find that the Government are establishing a Sanskrit school under Hindoo pandits to impart such knowledge as is already current in India....If it had been

> intended to keep the British nation in ignorance of real knowledge, the Baconian philosophy would not have been allowed to displace the system of the schoolmen which was the best calculated to perpetuate ignorance. In the same manner the Sanskrit system of education would be best calculated to keep this country in darkness, if such had been the policy of the British legislature. But as the improvement of the native population is the object of the government, it will consequently promote a more liberal and enlightened system of instruction, embracing mathematics, natural philosophy, chemistry and anatomy with other useful sciences which may be accomplished with the sum proposed by employing a few gentlemen of talents and learning educated in Europe and providing a college furnished with necessary books, instruments and other apparatus.

This particular letter which was addressed to Lord Amhearst put an end to confused thoughts churning inside the minds of the educated class. The foreign rulers were reluctant to introduce any new ideas of education chiefly because they were mortally afraid of inciting the sluggish majority. To appease the old guard, they had decided to maintain the old-fashioned Sanskrit schools. Besides, there was a serious agitation led by a large section of the orthodox elite against implanting a liberal education. A crucial moment had arrived when the majority would not perhaps support the Western education to replace the ancient system. However, Rammohun and David Hare took the lead as well as the burden of unjust criticism. The voluntary but persistent attempts to introduce progressive changes in the social and political sphere brought Rammohun and a handful of foreigners together again. They shared the view that a strictly orthodox educational system could not bring the necessary progress.

Rammohun welcomed new ideas, but did not discard the old. He believed in the coalescence of both Eastern and Western education, and appreciated their individual merit. This was all very well, but Rammohun's ideas were totally misunderstood by his own countrymen. There were not many even amongst the leaders of the society who were as level-headed as he. Some of them went to the extreme in whatever they undertook. Either they fanatically supported the obsolete customs and the method of teaching, or condemned everything Indian. The practical approach towards a rational educational system at last inspired a number of educated gentlemen without whose support it would have been difficult for Rammohun to make any headway.

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The reports of the French Revolution inspired the liberal-minded teachers of the Hindu college. Students were stimulated by political thoughts, lofty idealism, and the fundamental demand for rights. Youth reacted for the first time. Disagreement between the two generations created a gap.

In 1828 H. Vivien Derozio, an Anglo-Indian young man of Portuguese descent, eventually came into the picture. When he joined the Hindu college as a teacher he was hardly seventeen years old. But his radiant personality captured the attention of a large number of boys. Derozio was like a magnet, the students of Hindu College were drawn to him so spontaneously. His literary romanticism and spirit of independence impressed the boys from the orthodox families where parents seldom exchanged ideas with their children. Naturally, Derozio's offer of thrashing out personal conflicts in a group brought the boys closer to him. A friendly and stimulating atmosphere created by the new teacher led a few neglected boys to ignore the authority of the unsympathetic parents. Derozio was an idealist, a romantic poet and a writer. He also taught the boys to be respectful to the parents and yet taste the values of liberal thinking. Although a large section of boys felt immensely benefited, a small member took an extreme view of things and defied the discipline enforced in their own homes.

The Hindu College became a centre of cultural activity as far as the youth were concerned. The orthodox Governing body however did not have sympathies for the spirited youth. Some illiterate gossip-mongers went around from house to house spreading rumours that Derozio was teaching the boys to marry their own sisters to insult their family-deities and parents. The guardians believed all these and blamed Derozio for spreading social heresies. It was the boys from very self-centered families who behaved most irrationally. Their provocative behaviour was due to excessive intolerance demonstrated by the parents at home. Derozio was a perfect gentleman, a kind-hearted youth, and a free thinker. His love for his own parents, sisters, brothers and relatives gives proof of his warmth and affection for mankind. Derozio's intellectual equipment was immense. He was a prolific writer and earned reputation as a poet. His chief poetical work, *The Fakir of Jhungheera,* depicts the conflicts of a young widow forced to become a Suttee. The story reveals the cruelty of the orthodox society which could not bear to see the happiness of a young widow joining her lover. That the girl defied being a Suttee infuriated the unkind father who was responsible for her death. The orthodoxy of the feudal families, the narrow-mindedness of the cruel society are depicted clearly in the poem.

Derozio was a supporter of liberalism propagated by Rammohun. Being very young he might have lacked in maturity, but not in idealism. The unconventional behaviour of the students was not Derozio's fault. It was because the gap between the conservatives and the liberals was felt deeply by the youth.

Derozio never condemned religion as such, but was misunderstood by a handful of students who, taking advantage of the new-found freedom, became insolent towards the older generation. Derozio was accused unjustly and finally dismissed from the Hindu College for giving too much freedom to his boys. The conservative authorities of the college not only got rid of the Eurasian teacher, but also maligned his followers.

Although Derozio left the college in 1831, his students known as the Derozians or the Young Bengal did not forget him. The youthful admirers remained earnest and supported the progressive movements started by Rammohun and later on taken up by men like Debendarnath Tagore, Keshavchandra Sen and Iswar Chandra Vidyasagar.

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Rammohun's educational activities led to the establishment of Vedant College (1825) which offered facilities for intensive study of the Hindu scriptures. He published in 1826 a Bengali grammer in English. Its Bengali version *Gaudiya Vyakaran*, a unique contribution to the Bengali literary field, was published by the Calcutta School Book Society in 1833. Baboo Kishorichand Mitra said:

> Rammohun's Bengali was truly classical. All the vernacular writings are pre-eminently characterized by a chastity of diction, a suavity of style and a felicity of illustration, not to be met with in the writings of older Bengali writers.

Truly, Rammohun laid the foundation of Bengali prose.

Rammohun was the first man to realize that the country needed educational reforms on modern lines. As an educationist he advocated the study of Eastern philosophy and Western science simultaneously. He also realized the need for moral education that would help the youngsters form their character.

When Rammohun discarded the proposal of establishing Sanskrit schools he was bitterly criticized. His advocacy of scientific education as against the Tol system was misinterpreted and violently condemned by men upholding the traditional system of education. The Education Commission appointed by Lord Ripon in 1882 commented: "It took twelve years of controversy, the advocacy of Macaulay and decisive action of the new Governor-General, before the Committee could, as a body, acquire in the policy, urged by him (Rammohun)."

Rammohun regarded education as an essential weapon to fight social injustice. Eradication of mass illiteracy was given priority by him from the very outset but the question was hardly understood at that period, when the country merely survived under the mercy of tyrannical clannish aristocrats, and expedient foreign rulers.

When Alexander Duff, a young Scot, arrived at Calcutta it was Rammohun who welcomed him to his beautiful house in a suburb of Calcutta. "All true education," he remarked, "ought to be religious, since the object was not merely to give information but to develop and regulate all the powers of the mind, the emotions of heart, and the working of conscience."

Duff wanted to start a school but was facing the problem of accommodation. Rammohun offered him a small hall in Chitpur Road previously occupied by the Brahmo Sabha. This was the beginning of missionary schools in India. To Rammohun the cause of education was sacred; he placed it above caste, creed or sect.

Rammohun offered immense opportunities to the youth to derive the best from Eastern as well as Western education. Literature, poetry, discussion and debates brought vivacity and confidence; schools and colleges presented a lively horizon to the Bengali youth struggling to construct a civilized world free from intolerance, repression and prejudice. The modern era had dawned, shattering the fetters of self-exile.

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The Derozians or the Young Bengal as a progressive group still draws a vignette of the charismatic phase of the nineteenth-century Bengal. A few members amongst them had embraced religions other than Hinduism but they were not conscious of any differences. Most of them were ardent admirers of Rammohun, and supported his progressive reforms. In opposing caste persecution, in introducing widow-remarriage, and in propagating a healthy intellectual and literary life, they were equally enthusiastic. In the earlier days the members of Young Bengal proudly admitted that they were admirers of Derozio as he was a romantic writer and a patriotic liberal. The weekly and newspapers, *Ganannenshan* and *Enquirer* made pungent remarks about the selfish socialites and intolerant elite. Although most of the members of the Young Bengal were from a wealthy background, they were broad-minded, generous, and specially talented as individuals. Intellectually inspired, they took advantage of the reformation and contributed to the upliftment of the country in various ways.

It is true that some of the talented young men were individualists by nature; but they also respected the value of team work. Dakkhinaranjan Mukhopadhaya, apart from being interested in political and social reforms, was a successful lawyer and a philanthropist. Tarachand Chakrabarty was a fire-brand. After Rammohun's death, the sympathizers of the Reformation offered their services for the welfare of the oppressed and deserving. Although unconventional to a certain extent, some of the youth showed exceptional tolerance in times of crisis. It was chiefly a controversial period. An age of discovery in social, religious and political norms. Experiments had to be undertaken, mistakes had to be endured; prejudice had to be forgotten. Rammohun as the leader of the enlightened educationists inspired a galaxy of courageous men to keep up the spirit of progress and rationalism. The radical intellectuals and the quiet intellectuals both played their parts in the best way they could. Rammohun as the pioneer showed regard for every individual including Radhakanto Dev who wounded him many a time but was never treated shabbily even when his worst weaknesses were revealed. A civilized man treats his critics with special reverence. Rammohun set the example.

FIVE

CRUSADE AGAINST SUTTEE

"One big crash, flash of a single
light—a flame
From the whirlpool of a flame
shoots out a meteor
A colossal and devilish darkness
engulfs the massive space
Between the world and me!"
—GOTTFRIED BENN (*German Poet*)

THERE IS controversy about Rammohun's witnessing Alokmanjari's death but the legend has left a deep impact.

Whether Rammohun had witnessed a Suttee in his own house or at any other place is immaterial: what is important is that as a reaction to this abominable social custom he took a vow to end it. Without a systemic propaganda against it, no Governor-General could have succeeded in abolishing Suttee. The numerous religious controversies, the academic discussions, and the formation of the Atmiya Sabha–everything gradually gained a positive meaning. It was through agitations and organised groups that Rammohun was directly and indirectly influencing the religious heads as well as the uneducated countrymen for whom he had equal love and affection. Whether the biased section of his countrymen approved of his ideas or not did not create any tension in his mind; rather the orthodox group developed an uncanny awarness of a powerful opponent endowed with a deep sense of humanism, and a practical bent of mind.

A Suttee—a virtuous and loyal wife—was considered a matter of pride as long as she stooped to the social persecutions particularly after her husband's death. Suttee was an ancient custom observed in India. Legendary stories are full of praise for women who had plunged into the funeral pyre of their husbands. But the custom had become a social evil leading to a sort of self-immolation prevalent in various parts of the country especially in and around Bengal where the East India Company officials deliberately remained indifferent.

It apparently took the shape of a religious custom directed towards subtle murder of widows. A widow was not looked upon with respect unless she was prepared to undertake the act of suicide. She would otherwise undergo humiliation and torture.

If diving into the blazing pile was such a great feat of valour, why did not a man perform such a glorious feat after the death of a revered parent, wife or a venerable woman? Obviously, no one had taken up the challenge of tracing the root cause of such a custom. This was all a part of a totally decadent society where the status of women was considerably low. Although soaked in merciful thoughts, Rammohun's sharp eyes were vigilant as far as social injustice was concerned. He had little faith in the patronage doled out by men in the garb of spiritual protection, and humble piety. Underneath his strong feelings against the outrageous rites was his deep, committed sense of philanthropy; a keen desire to see that "justice must not only be done but must seem to be done." Every man or woman born under the sky should have equal rights. Rammohun was often accosted by enemies who seldom ceased to malign him. Totally indifferent to pinpricks and completely oblivious of personal self-interest, he proved to be perfectly sincere in his efforts. He was armed with rare moral courage. Defiantly devotional in his campaign, Rammohun proved to be a lover of truth and mankind. He was particularly kind to women, and fought for the abolition of a social custom which was meant to reduce a woman's prestige to ashes.

Exactly 143 years ago, Suttee was abolished by legislation. But how difficult it is today to think of the horror and the savage brutality associated with the custom Rammohun's promptness in rectifying the distorted quotations from Hindu scriptures was admirable. He needed superhuman energy and tact. And he was preparing himself for one of the toughest battles which he fought and won.

Suttee led Indian widows to the blazing fire. Often, they were led by brute force, while the crowd witnessed a symbolical drama of pretended pathos. It was accompanied by fanaticism and fake heroism. A civilized man that he was, Rammohun could not leave it to luck, nor to an indefinite period of postponement. The majority of the countrymen referred to Suttee as part of religion. Rammohun challenged it. A single voice against millions! His declaration baffled the Europeans and the Company officials. It surprised the Missionaries. Immediately the question became a subject of dispute amongst the learned as well as the layman. The task of explaining the truth that Suttee did not derive sanction from the scriptures was neither simple nor pleasant, specially when the orthodox pandits and Brahmins immediately took shelter under the roof of ancient Hindu scriptures and persisted in opposing Rammohun.

The British rulers were interested in trading with the Indian elite; they had no desire to enter deeply into any matters other than those which affected their own interests. They were afraid of generating unpopularity by interfering in the social affairs of the people. Their capricious patronage often impressed a large number of Indians; mostly the Brahmin priests who exploited all other classes as a matter of right and routine. In Rammohun's case, a transition from a high class Brahmin to a tough reformer was a sort of revolution, a strange one perhaps. The Brahmin priests had unlimited influence on the Hindu society, constantly forcing the widows to observe Suttee. Who would dare defy the priests, the representatives of the Gods! Could an uneducated, unprotected, grief-stricken young widow take the lead? She would be cursed by endless Divinities, and pushed into Hell! Similarly, could an old helpless woman with not a single pie in her hand, have the courage to defy the society? With no social status or financial security, could a single widow claim to defy the customary rite? Some chose Suttee as a better evil to a slow living death. According to Max Mueller, Suttee was "perhaps the most flagrant instance of what can be done by unscrupulous priesthood." Obviously there was a vested interest behind this abominable custom. Outwardly men supported the tradition as part of Hindu law. How many untruths had been spoken, how many myths were fabricated, merely to get rid of the widows whose burden would otherwise fall on the heads of the family!

The Hindu community at this particular period differed from other religious communities in India who believed that the widow was not a slave or a "thing" to be destroyed. Rammohun took particular care to explore the Hindu Sastras which were wrongly presented by interested parties supporting Suttee.

A Bengali Hindu widow even fifty years ago was a symbol of misery: her head shaven, her limbs stripped of every piece of jewellery; her red-bordered saree replaced by a borderless dhoti so that she may neither look like a man, nor a woman. A pathetic sight of a Bengali widow often terrified children who were shocked to see a sudden change of the mother in attire and appearance. Was she not a picture of grace a few hours ago? Until their father had breathed his last? Widowhood in Bengal symbolized complete disaster; a widow was made to feel like a symbol of bad omen–inauspicious. She was forbidden to attend any auspicious ceremony, specially a wedding. Her fasts and her meagre meals, her acceptance of slavery, and her life of negation were highly praised by the leaders of the society. Death penalty was perhaps chosen by some women merely because the alternative would be even worse. Rammohun realized the deprivation of the widows. He studied the religious laws and was convinced that the degraded society was not following the true forms of decency which existed in ancient India. Laws had been distorted, abused, taken advantage of. Even the Muslim rulers endeavoured to put a stop to the practice of Suttee. Akbar was against compulsion: Jehangir prescribed death penalty for forcing a woman to be a Suttee. Aurangzeb declared that no woman within the Mughul territory would be allowed to be burnt alive. The majority of Hindu conservatives however led a wild propaganda against abolition. The agitation was on religious grounds which Rammohun refuted. No one before him took it up with such persistance. Rammohun felt so intensely about the Suttee that he roamed around the burning ghats and tried to persuade the mourners to spare the widow. At one instance, he found a woman reluctant to perform the rite. She was waiting to be rescued. But her guardians mischievously declared Rammohun a Muslim and asked him to stay away, not to interfere. Most traditionalists thought it best to insult him by calling him an atheist, or at times a Muslim. They seldom acknowledged his natural sympathies for women. Lack of humanism on the part of the leading citizens hurt Rammohun a great deal nevertheless, he tried to preserve his calmness even when he was greatly provoked. Frequently, he was ridiculed and threatened, sometimes ostracised. But he did not feel discouraged. Even personal attacks could not crush his spirit. He could refute illogical arguments with ease. In the case of Suttee, he took up the cause with a heart drenched with human compassion. After several appeals, the anti-Suttee campaign aroused public sympathy, including the foreigners'. In the past, the Company officials and the British Governers were not altogether unaware of the issue, but they were not willing to make a quick decision. They would not abolish the rite by legislation. Rammohun sensed that the British rulers were acting from an ulterior motive probably they were afraid of violent mass protest. It was the fault of the educated Indians who allowed the custom to continue so long. Mere persuation proved ineffective. Now, legislation alone could root out the social evil. But Rammohun believed in reaching the climax only after a gradual process of deprecation. It was essential to create a sympathetic public opinion. People should themselves feel the responsibility and react rationally. He took the practical path. It was high time that the correct interpretations of the Hindu scriptures were to be placed in front of both the Indian and European gentlemen. His English translations of the Sastras drew attention of the British residents, however placid they might have been in the past. The *Calcutta Journal* and the *Calcutta Gazette* published letters of appreciation:

We have much satisfaction in stating that the

> attention of Government continues to be directed to a consideration of the various plans and means that have been suggested for the abolition of practice of Suttee-burning. An eminent native philanthropist, who has long taken the lead of his countrymen on this great question of humanity and civilised government has been encouraged to submit his view of it in a written form, and has been subsequently honoured with an audience by the Governor-General who we learn has expressed his anxious desire to put an end to a custom constituting such a foul blot on the character of our native subjects, as well on that of the British Indian Government, which permits and sanctions it.

The authorities of Fort William felt uneasy as Rammohun would not allow them to take the matter casually. They ultimately produced a Blue Book after making an elaborate statistical research on the past incidents, both voluntary and forced. What they submitted to the Court of Directors was hardly anything constructive or decisive. Their timidity and callousness with regard to the question of abolition sounded more like an indirect connivance in favour of continuing the Suttee. As though the issue should lie in the hands of the irrational fanatics! One way of shirking their own responsibility! A number of Governor-Generals in spite of their formal philanthropic air actually proved to be mere weaklings. Their reluctance to express any positive disapproval made it easier for Rammohun's opponents to isolate him. The judges, on the other hand, appeared more sincere. They were genuinely sympathetic towards abolishing Suttee. The Christian community much later became acquainted with the elaborate documents and letters produced by Rammohun, his friends and supporters. Swami Harihariananda, a dependable friend of Rammohun, wrote a letter to the Indian Gazette on 27 March 1818, long before the agitation had spread so widely.

> "...the practice of burning widows is still continued and in the manner which has been declared illegal and murderous. At this I cannot help astonishment, as I am at a loss to conceive how persons can reconcile themselves to the stigma of being accused of woman murder.... I feel also both surprise and regret that European gentlemen, who boast of the humility and morality of their religion, should conduct themselves towards persons who submit quietly to the imputation of murder with the same politeness and kindness they would show to the most respectable persons...."

Meanwhile, the membership of Atmiya Sabha increased rapidly, and a larger number of liberal citizens voted against Suttee. Public opinion slowly headed towards opposing the practice of Suttee. The simple manner in which Rammohun sounded every section of the society shows his understanding of a misguided people. The lucid style of presentation compelled his countrymen to consider the issue with compassion. We are amazed at his vigorous but tactful approach. He was not facing a sympathetic crowd at any stage; yet his power of persuasion shook all sections until melodramas, debates, false accusations, and moral blackmail crumbled in front of his humility added to his gentle use of noble force.

Bengal, in spite of its educational progress and partial enlightenment, was one of the provinces groaning under the curse of Suttee, child murder and polygamy. As the campaign against Suttee became widespread, the number of forced suicides and murders became less. But the Brahmins were still forcing the non-Brahmins to follow the custom. The ordinary man did not have the courage to defy the high caste leaders of the society. As a matter of policy, the agitation had to be kept in full swing. Rammohun continued to write against Suttee and in the process used the press as an effective organ of propaganda. *Samachar Chandrika*, the organ of the orthodox section continued to splash anti-liberal slogans; while *Sambad Kaumudi* supported the idea of abolition and exposed the nefarious game of the supporters of Suttee who collected funds from the poor and illiterate in order to mobilize the anti-abolitionists.

The Brahmo Sabha was already functioning from 1828. Apart from religious reforms it took up women's causes, philanthropic work and other progressive issues. The movement was at times disrupted by violent opposition and frequent explosion. Recognition of all liberal organizations and supporting other religious bodies created a deep-rooted animosity against the Brahmo Samaj. When it came to upliftment of women, the pandits were ready to take Rammohun's life. Swinging back a century and a half, one can perhaps visualize the reaction of the supersition-ridden misogynists who could not tolerate any semblance of progress where women were concerned. New ideas infuriated the traditionalists. Rammohun was prepared to accept the customs based on reason, but his total rejection of the primitive customs created an uproar. Fortunately, he never suffered from a feeling of personal rancour. His idea was to help the layman, and remove the drawbacks of the prejudiced society. The darkness cleared up gradually. Rammohun saw the silver lining. In its last phase of isolation the inspired soul met a really understanding man. In 1828 (July) Lord William Bentinck took over as Governor-General after Amhearst's departure. With Rammohun Roy, Dwarkanath Tagore, Prassanna Kumar Tagore, Rev. William Adam and David Hare as the chief supporters of the abolition, Bentinck banned Suttee by legislation on 4 December 1829.

It was a great achievement, and the most significant reform of the period. Lord Bentinck could not have taken a positive stand without the support of a group of dynamic individuals led by Rammohun, whose untiring efforts at last met with success. He had started working for the abolition from 1812. The previous Governor-Generals, although well aware of the facts, did not have the courage to take any positive action. Since 1805 several discussions had taken place. But few had the moral courage to fight against it. Since the Sastras were referred to, no British ruler had the heart or grit to take any drastic step. The journals and newspapers, the British press and the progressive editors now congratulated Rammohun and helped in forming an opinion pool in his favour. He did not need any applause–he wanted to give freedom to the widows. He honoured women of all status.

As early as 1818, Rammohun published a tract in the form of a dialogue between an "Opponent" and an "Advocate" of the custom. In 1820 this was followed by a second tract between the two. The original tract was written in Bengali, and was circulated free by Rammohun. He knew very well that his countrymen would not purchase pamphlets containing liberal thoughts. But he was keen to reveal the truth that the interested parties were exploiting the people in the name of the Sastras. The society supported Suttee actually from a motive of self-interest. The translation in English is entitled *The Conference between an Advocate for and an Opponent of the Practice of Burning Widows.* The second tract, *A Second Conference* was published and dedicated to Lady Hastings by Rammohun.

The combatant placed the controversy into the hands of the spectators watching a drama! An original and effective way of discussing the issue! This disarming spirit evoked the sympathy of the public. According to the "Advocate", the concremation or post-cremation would mean a place in heaven for over thirty-five million years. Suttee therefore was performed for the sake of gratification in the world and next. The idea of performing a meritorious act with a motive for personal gain makes a Hindu an inferior devotee. The Katha Upanishad is quoted thus:

> Faith in God which leads to absorption, is one thing and rites which have future fruition for their object, another. Each of these producing different consequences, holds out to man inducements to follow it. The man who of these two chooses faith is blessed; and, who for the sake of reward, practices rites, is dashed away from the enjoyment of eternal beatitude.

The "Opponent" explains the laws of Manu, the great law-giver who enjoined that the widow should live an ascetic life. In this style the "Opponent" leads the discussions to a critical point; the "Advocate" denies emphatically that women are capable of permanent virtue and should perish along with the husband rather than go astray. At this point Rammohun enters upon a logical controversy, obviously to rightly defend the women of India, and also to uphold their fine qualities which men usually ignore. The society, according to the reformer, had continuously ill-treated the women; as a result they had been deprived of all privileges. But in spite of all the persecution women suffered they had shown outstanding courage, determination and patience, also magnanimity and loyalty. The systematic arguments created a stir, for by defending women he exposed the weakness of men. This was a novel style highly appreciated by the young educated class. In every step of his logical advocacy, the reformer's deep sense of justice became crystal clear.

At the outset Rammohun stated that women had been regarded as inferior and weak in understanding. He pointed out immediately that women had never been given any chance or opportunity to assert their views. Neither did women get any formal education—not even the elementary schooling. So the question of inferiority did not arise. In ancient India, on the other hand, women like Lilabati, Bhanumati, Maitrayi, who were given equal chances of learning the Sastras, proved exceptionally intelligent. Their natural wisdom and common sense were in no way less than men of intellect. The women who were given the facilities to acquire knowledge became well-versed in the Sastras and were looked upon with great esteem. Their names are often quoted by men of letters even to this day. The Hindu society after its deterioration left the women in complete darkness, deprived of all education. Men have taken advantage of the submissiveness of women.

Secondly, if women were lacking in decision, they could not make up their minds so easily to jump into the funeral pyre. Her spirit of sacrifice stands out as a virtue.

Thirdly, as far as trustworthiness is concerned, women have always proved more faithful than men. So many women living in the villages have been deceived by men, for which women took no revenge. A woman's failings have never been forgiven by a man. But a man even if he has been a debauch or a lout, was forgiven by his wife immediately. Women have trusted men in spite of all the deceptions they have experienced. Perhaps their simplicity makes them swallow a good lie. Suspicion is not their basic nature for they are forgiving and affectionate by nature.

As far as their controlling physical passions, men never thought it was necessary. Polgamy was a common practice; a man had the right to marry any number of wives. A woman on the other hand married only once and was obliged to die together with the husband. Or else, if she survived, her life would be one of drudgery. And strictly ascetic!

With regard to a wife's status, Rammohun made pungent remarks. He attacked the Brahmins who treated their wives like cattle and seldom remembered how many wives they had.

> In times of want (he remarks) the wife works like a slave. In times of affluence, the husband takes another wife, and enjoys all worldly pleasures. Very often the wife is beaten up, discarded, accused of disloyalty, all because the husband feels that he has the right to do so.

He felt that no respect was shown to the women, whether wife or sister or daughter or mother: neither the old nor the young. After all this, women were tied down to the pyre to burn like a piece of dead and dried up firewood.

These were the frank comments of Rammohun, against the society particularly callous about women. He used *Sambad Kaumudi* as a means of communication with the public. In reply the *Sambad Chandrika* refuted Rammohun's criticisms. Gradually all the journals and weeklies became equally eloquent and published the opinions of the rival camps. For several years in the past, the British were made to understand that Suttee could not be touched on religious grounds. Now, Rammohun explained elaborately that there was no clause in the Sastras which demanded compulsory suicide, or murder of widows. The story that the widow was expected to be consumed by fire together with husband was mere fabrication. The custom therefore had to be abolished on humanitarian grounds.

The Nizamut Adalat took it up in 1821. The Governor-General Lord Hastings and the judges Lyester, Smith and Dorin realized the appalling increase of the practice. But Lord Hastings still insisted that the time had not arrived when it should be abolished by force, or even legislation. He felt that education alone could help people realise the absurdity of the custom. Nevertheless he depended a good deal on Rammohun and his followers for the campaign against Suttee.

In the course of educating the people, Rammohun pointed out that the widows had become victims, because the law of inheritance was abused. Due to the abuse of law, women have been deprived of their legitimate right to inherit after the death of their husbands. Naturally, they had few alternatives left. Either to live as a slave, or join the oldest profession; or to die on the funeral pyre as the neighbours shower applause. Rammohun emphasized that Hindu antiquity had made honourable provision for the maintainence of the widow but the laws have been over-ruled, misused. Consequently the issue of widow-remarriage, he thought was not tabooed by religion nor condemned by Sastras. The main idea was to guide the widow to live a straight, clean life, Rammohun revolted against the idea of polygamy. Much later Ishwar Chandra Vidyasagar, a devoted philanthropist and a scholar took up the cause of widow-remarriage. The significant issues which helped the cause of women was seldom overlooked by humanists who had come under the influence of Rammohan Roy. The enlightened students of the Hindu college despite parental resentment supported a number of progressive reforms sponsored by the liberal intellectuals. Their spontaneous enthusiasm was kept alive for several years in spite of the blatant disapproval expressed by orthodox leaders like Radhakanto Dev and his admirers.

The British officials were still nervous about forcing people to abandon the practice of Suttee. The judges were of the opinion that the cases were increasing and the police had to exercise a strong control, and stop people by persuasion. Suttee was increasing around Calcutta. Judge Smith insisted that immediate and entire prohibition was imperative. He was supported by other Judges: Ross, Harrington and Bayley. But Lord Amhearst who succeeded Hastings, was not prepared to crush it by pressure. He left India in 1828, after declining to legislate. The impression was that Amhearst did not show any resistance against Suttee. Rather, he preferred to leave India without taking the responsibility of the vital issue.

Lord William Bentinck's arrival in India in 1828 (4 July) marks a significant phase. He was both energetic and earnest in his efforts to improve the conditions of the British as well as the native population. Bentinck would not wait for a few years more for the abolition of Suttee, as Amhearst had recommended. Having followed the historical facts and the social climate, Bentinck studied the paradoxical problems of Suttee with an open mind. The question of keeping silent or even being casual about it appeared totally meaningless to him. The prestige of the British Government did not hold high! Neither the governed nor the ruler showed signs of sanity.

As Max Mueller puts it:

> This was in 1831, it was the year of Reform Bill, and a shudder comes over one if one realizes the fact that up to that time, in a country governed by some of the greatest English statesmen, women were burnt wholesale even in the immediate neighbourhood of Calcutta.

Bentinck was aware of the lack of initiative on the part of the officials and felt the urgency of handling the issue personally. The judges were in the majority but the opinion of the native population was not sounded fully. Guided by his own reading of the emergency however, he came to the conclusion that he needed help from amongst the liberal Indians. His choice was the best. Rammohun was approached and taken into confidence. Although maligned by the majority, Rammohun had a handful of supporters. Men like Dwarkanath Tagore, Prasanna Tagore, David Hare, William Adam and a number of progressive journalists gave him full support. The liberal students of the Hindu college openly supported the cause. But Rammohun advised against any drastic measure which could suddenly turn the people towards hostility. Yet he was in favour of maintaining the tempo of propaganda through meetings and press reports. The series of contradictory comments and reports flowing from the various journals brought about a social change. The intelligentsia became unexpectably alert. Rammohun's efforts bore fruit at last. More men came to help him in propagating the issue. The orthodox set of scholars nevertheless tried their best to antagonize the people against Rammohun's views. The British Government as well as the natives had to be convinced that the Hindu Sastras did not support compulsory Suttee, nor demanded concremation or post-cremation. It was made clear that there was no question of voluntary surrender. It was a myth. The majority of widows were forced into the ordeal. The company Government was relieved when Rammohun proved that Suttee was not a religious duty. He also made it clear that the avaricious desire of relatives to avoid the cost of supporting the bereaved widow was one of the main reasons for supporting Suttee.

Samachar Chandrika, as a matter of principle protested against the abolition. The *Sambad Kaumudi* and the *Banga Doot* as mouthpieces of the liberals, directed the Government's vision to the correct angle. When the pandits collected 125 signatures to oppose the abolition of Suttee, Lord Bentinck was asked to reconsider it for the sake of religion. Bentinck took a firm stand. He quoted that the wives were not required to destroy themselves according to the Hindu religious customs. When the Dharma Sabha insisted on not recognizing the abolition, Bentinck suggested that they might appeal to the King-in-Council. Another petition was signed by 346 respectable citizens and twenty-eight pandits. Side by side counter demonstrations and propaganda were sponsored by the Christian population and the Hindu liberals. The famous minute on Suttee issued by Lord William Bentinck in November 1829 made his intentions clear. Quoted below is an excerpt from the notification banning Suttee:

> The first and primary object of my heart is the benefit of the Hindus. I know nothing so important to the improvement of their future condition as the establishment of a purer morality, whatever their belief and a more just conception of the will of God. The first step to this better understanding will be dissociation of the religious belief and practice from blood and murder.... I write and feel as a legislature for

> the Hindus, and believe as many enlightened Hindus think and feel. Descending from these higher considerations, it cannot be a dishonest ambition that the Government for which I form a part, should have the credit of an act which is to wash out a foul stain upon British Rule and to stay the sacrifice of humanity and justice to a doubtful expendiency, and finally as a branch of the general administration of the Empire, I may be permitted to feel deeply anxious that our course shall be in accordance with the noble example set to us by the British Government at home. . . .

Soon after this was circulated by the Government, Mrs. Frances Keith Martin's letter acknowledging Rammohun's credit for the abolition of Suttee was published in 26 November 1829. She wrote to the editor of *Bengal Harkaru* and *Chronicle:*

> Sir,
> Your observation, I have observed, would not now in utmost probability have been brought into effect but for the powerful though unacknowledged aid of the great Hindu philosopher Rammohun Roy. . . to remember the following sympathy, intelligence and fearless energy displayed through a course of eighteen years by their great and at length successful advocate, Rammohun Roy.

In due course, the Brahma Sabha sponsored more liberal changes. In fact, most of the reforms were suggested and supported by the active members of the Samaj. Polygamy, child-marriage, and negligence of widows, were condemned by them. The orthodox community could not bear the determined effort of Rammohun and his colleagues. Under the leadership of Radhakanto Dev, they decided to appeal to the authorities in England. The Dharma Sabha was formed with the aim of destroying all progressive movements. The aggressive pandits, scandalized by the thought of abolition of Suttee, started collecting signatures and donations for organizing a regular counter propaganda committee and for sending a deputation abroad. Bentinck heard the loud whispers of the intrigue. He remained stubborn. He issued the following note.

> It is hereby declared that after the promulgation of this regulation all persons convicted of aiding and abetting in the sacrifice of a Hindu widow by burning and burying her alive, whether the sacrifice be voluntary on her part or not, shall be deemed guilty of culpable homicide and shall be liable to punishment by fine or imprisonment or both by fine and imprisonment.

The regulation was passed on 4 December 1829.

The Dharma Sabha started hatching a quiet conspiracy against the abolition of Suttee.

The opening of the new building of the Brahmo Samaj on January 23, 1830 created further discontent in the opposite camp whose leader Radhakanto Dev, a well-read Sanskrit scholar, had hardly any regard for people who were trying to change the structure of the old society. From the onset he developed a serious dislike for the Brahmo Samaj and its leaders. Hence his fresh enthusiasm to fight against social reforms infected a large number of Hindus with similar views. The country was divided into two camps—The liberals and the conservatives. Numerous meetings and conferences were summoned by the Brahmin pandits in order to condemn Rammohun and his progressive reforms. At one stage, Rammohun was threatened with murder. Countrywide demonstrations aroused every householder. There was never a dull moment. Malicious verses and satires kept the people amused. Dramatic speeches and oratory thrilled the idle rich. The printers and publishers had a busy time. Ignoring the resonant echoes of meaningless sensationalism, Rammohun remained alert and calm. As he was firm, he was not spared harassment. On his way to the Brahmo Samaj prayer meetings, he was accosted and abused by passersby. He had to overlook the insults. The journals, weeklies and newspapers had never been so eloquent before. They were either full of enthusiasm, or bursting with resentment. The liberals congratulated Rammohun, whereas the conservatives let loose their gossipy tongues. Public places like the river-sides, road-sides, and markets, resounded with repugnance and spite! Modern ideas or rational behaviour were ridiculed right and left. Only the unique stand that was taken to raise the status of women suddenly drew attention. A set of determined liberals got deeply involved in the turmoil of reformation. Several bureaucrats who usually remained aloof, were gradually converted into appreciating the merits of liberalism. The Tory Government in England always slow in understanding, now realized the significance of the Indian renaissance. The *Samachar Darpan* of the Serampore Missionaries could not remain indifferent. The British citizens and the educated Indians both responded to the challenge taken up by the anti-Suttee workers. But the unrealistic anti-liberals tried desperately for the last time to foil the attempts of the free-thinkers. The Dharma Sabha met frequently and spoke vociferously against the reformers. It collected funds to send a representative to England who could present the case to the King-in-Council.

A sarcastic letter referring to Suttee is given below:

> Sir,
>
> We beg you will oblige us by giving insertion to the following letter in your widely circulated paper.
>
> We feel much delight in saying that the practice of Suttee exercised in various parts of the East India. . . have instituted a society entitled 'The Dharma Sabha.' The members assembled have resolved that as the rulers, a nation of contrary faith, are adopting measures for gradually making a way with the religious customs and manners practised by the Hindoo from immemorial ages, a petition should be sent to England to be

> presented to Parliament entreating their permission for the toleration of those usages. As it is said that this measure will succeed in restoring all the Hindoo usages and custom abolished by the Government, we, the criminal prisioners of the Allypore Jail, most submissively entreat to bring to the notice of the compassionate members of the Dharma Sabha and their deputy the European gentlemen, that theft and robbery are our ancestral and family usages and customs.

The petition of the orthodox Hindus published on 14 January 1830 reads thus:

> To the right honourable Lord William Cavendish Bentinck,
> My Lord,
> We, the undersigned, beg leave respectfully to submit the following petition to your Lordship in Council, in consequence of having heard that certain persons taking upon themselves to represent the opinions and feelings of the Hindoo inhabitants of Calcutta, have misrepresented those opinions and feelings and that your Lordship in Council is about to pass a resolution, founded on such erroneous statements to put a stop to the practice of performing Suttee, an interference with the religion and customs of the Hindus which we most earnestly deprecate and cannot view without the most serious alarm... That woman who on the death of her husband ascends the same burning pile with him is exalted to heaven as equal in virtue to Arundhooty.

> She who follows her husband to another world shall dwell in a region of joy for so many years as there are hairs on the human body, or thirty-five million years. As a serpent catcher forcibly draws a snake from his hole, drawing her lord from a region of torment, she enjoys delight together with him. The woman who follows her husband to the pile expiates the sins of three generations of the paternal and maternal side of that family to which she was given while a virgin.

The letters explain the obsession of the apprehensive masses. Any number of articles, letters, essays, documents and reports were published both the liberal and conservative camps.

The opponents of Rammohun made another effort which resulted in complete disaster as far as the Dharma Sabha was concerned.

Mr. Bathie was appointed attorney to move for repealing the Suttee: he was to represent the case on behalf of the Dharma Sabha. The expenditure would be borne by the Committee so keen to re-establish the rights of the Brahmins to follow the tradition. Funds and donations were raised. Mr. Bathie was ready to step out of India, confident and proud. He was offered a fabulous sum of Rs. 50,000. Unluckily, ship in which Mr. Bathie sailed was wrecked at sea. The beginning of the voyage was marked by an ill omen, but Bathie was saved. In the meantime Rammohun had sent a counter-petition to the King-in-Council for which he did not accept any monetary help.

As expected, Rammohun's petition was well received by the liberals in England. The conservatives in Bengal could not bear to hear Rammohun's praise; *Samachar Chandrika* tried not to take any notice of the report. On his arrival in England, Rammohun presented the counter-petition to the House of Lords. The hearing of the Appeal took place before the Privy Council in July 1832, when he was honoured by the presiding judges. After the hearing of the case the judges unanimously advised his Majesty to reject the appeal that was presented by the Dharma Sabha. The news was splashed in the newspapers in India, and circulated among the British intellectuals. The reactions of the two camps in Bengal were naturally quite contrary ! However Mr. Bathie continued to give false hopes of victory by suggesting an appeal to the King himself; but with no consequence. In Calcutta, there was much jubilation on the success of Rammohun's mission. The *Samachar Chandrika,* however, lamented and commented like a hurt child. The *Samachar Darpan* condemned the false allegations of the *Chandrika* and congratulated the British liberals on their victory. The Dharma Sabha which was based on fanaticism and disdain lost most of its prestige after this show-down. *Sambad Kaumudi* now brought out a series of articles which gave rise to serious controversies. A number of reforms were immediately undertaken by Rammohun and his followers. The Brahma Sabha's genuine interest in the social cause ultimately drew more people towards the Samaj.

SIX

FOUNDATION OF A FAITH

> *"A poet of the world am I*
> *I know no debate*
> *I look upon it as a whole."*
>
> —TAGORE

JUDGING FROM the various essays, tracts and publications of Rammohun, it is not difficult to assess his idealism recapturing the significance of universal theism. The theological commentary on the preachings of the Christian Missionaries was mainly to express his faith in the lofty messages of Jesus Christ, his deep regard for the original precepts, and also his emphasis on the merits of Unitarianism in place of the Trinity. Rammohun's interpretation of the Hindu scriptures had one basic object: To remove the misunderstandings with the Hindu priesthood who were unconsciously distorting the fundamentals of Hinduism. Similarly, it was the rational form of Islam referring to the Mutazalis and Muwahhidins that captured his imagination. In the same way, the basic conception of the "universal brotherhood" laid down by the Buddha attracted him. Evidently, it was the essence of every historic religion which appealed to him.

Unfortunately the monotheistic ideology was repeatedly misrepresented by the religious leaders. The numerous research groups Rammohun encountered could not ignore the fact that he discovered the unity of religions. Comparative religion as a subject of study was his source of inspiration. Rammohun was a pioneer in this field of research. Both Max Mueller and Monier Williams acknowledged that Rammohun was perhaps the most progressive theologian, for nowhere in the world before him was comparative study of religions included in any religious discussion. Rammohun's love for all world religions developed from his extensive investigation of faiths. He was naturally inclined to exchange ideas with people belonging to various communities. Those who did not understand his appeal criticized him strongly. Others suffered from doubt. Many left him for fear of unpopularity and loss of situation. Rammohun, however, was unperturbed. He was aware of the supreme power of Brahman and felt His presence in whatever he undertook as truth. At this juncture he had grasped the concept of monotheism, and consequently the idea of universalism. His temporary isolation from his own countrymen left him undaunted. The intelligentsia, however small in number, appreciated his rational stand. Neither persuasion nor threat could deflect him from the path he had chosen. He could truthfully admit that he belonged to every religious faith, provided it accepted the principles of monotheism.

The accent on synthesis is the chief characteristic of Rammohun's faith. Naturally, conflict arose in the minds of the traditionalists who believed in the validity of both truth and untruth. It did not disturb those who cherished the desire to witness the point of concord, and not disharmony. The inquest leading to polemics was meant to reassure the devotee to remain faithful to the Supreme Being and not to be influenced by half-truths. These queries were not mere intellectual exercises. What they expounded was the virtue of that divine faith which is charity and tolerance. There was no intention on Rammohun's part to reject the Gospel of Jesus or to deny the validity of the ancient Hindu scriptures. In the process of unravelling the truth, he had to expose the evil effects of propaganda against the merits of both Christianity and Hinduism Mythology and 'holiness' kept the ignorant under a spell. They could neither distinguish caste-domination from fundamental rights nor separate facts from myths. Rammohun was condemned as a bigot and an atheist. He was misunderstood as much as misrepresented. Scholars and reformers who have been victimized by society usually became silent and retire from public service. Rammohun on the contrary retired from work to serve his countrymen. Instead of preaching like a prophet he reasoned out in the manner of an advocate. To him, humanism was not mere emotional effervescence, but constant vigilance over man's right to freedom. He had to win the battle, not for himself but for the people.

That Rammohun was temporarily drawn towards Unitarian Christianity should not surprise us. Unhestitatingly he declared his respect for this Church because it did not preach reincarnation, the supernatural miracles and the Trinity. The solemnity of Church service touched him. Rammohun was consistent in his efforts to de-mythologise the Christian and Hindu scriptures, and his denunciation of the ritual practised by the Lamas naturally created enemies. Only a handful of friends grasped the significance of the unity of God which was his article of faith. By now, he had written enough, and had answered many questions. As far as he was concerned the debates were aimed at clarifying the erroneous cliche. His quest was not fulfilled until he reached a stage where he could meet people at one level only—the platform of truth. Rammohun openheartedly joined the services of the Church, himself remaining a liberal Hindu. Did he not convey to his countrymen that his evangelical involvement was not for asserting his personal achievement, but to proclaim that he was a simple devotee invoking the Divine Authority ruling over man irrespective of caste, creed or colour? How could he not share his joy of such unique realization? His faith was vibrant and vigorous.

The year Rammohun settled in Calcutta was marked by a major event. People had already heard of the theological discussions taking place in his residence in Rangpur. There was curiosity about the scholar's arrival though tinged with both suspicion and admiration. The Atmiya Sabha (The Society of Friends) was drawing attention. While he was residing at Maniktola, the Atmiya Sabha was functioning under his direct guidance.

Religious discourses were read out and commented upon. The members tried to understand one another's viewpoint in spite of their differences. A good many influencial citizens were taking a serious interest in the modest assembly. Vedic verses were read out by Shivaprasad Mishra while Govindamala took charge of the devotional hymns. The serenity of the prayer meetings attracted a larger number everyday. Unfortunately the entire conception of Atmiya Sabha was repugnant to the orthodox leaders of Hindu society. They were not merely passive in their resentment but positively hostile towards the organization. As a result, a large number of Rammohun's followers deserted him for fear of being ostracized. Jaikrishen Singha left Rammohun and spread wild rumours that the Atmiya Sabha was established to introduce cow-slaughter inside the premises. Instead of reacting adversely to the personal attacks, Rammohun reconciled himself to the fact that all new ideas were usually rejected at the initial stage. He prayed for the best. His prayers were so full of piety and conviction that a thousand pinpricks and slights did not diminish his spirit. The friends who remained loyal to him were Dwarkanath Tagore, Prasanna Kumar Tagore, Haladhar Basu, Nandakishore Basu, Rajnarain Sen, Brijmohan Majumdar, and his childhood friend Hariharananda Tirthaswami. They continued as regular members of the Atmiya Sabha.

Rammohun's defiance however enraged his relatives. His mother Tarini Devi and his brothers and nephews renewed a libellous onslaught. His wives developed a sort of detachment. The family members took him to court to deprive Rammohun of his rights in the ancestral property. During this domestic upheavel, the meetings of the Atmiya Sabha took place at various other places as Rammohun failed to attend the meetings for a long period of time. Govindaprasad, Jagamohan's son, transferred the case to the Supreme Court. Rammohun was much harassed and he had to spend enormous sums of money and practically all his time to fight against the conspiracy. The case against Rammohun failed. But the ordeal of this prolonged harassment had taken its toll. Govindaprasad was repentant in the end for taking this dishonest step merely to please the members of his family. He wrote to his uncle for pardon and his letter expressed deep regret.

At about the same time the Maharaja of Burdwan, an old enemy of Ramkanto Roy, filed a suit against Rammohun but this also proved to be a false claim. These legal persecutions demonstrate the resentment of people who were influential and vindictive—a resentment caused by Rammohun's non-conformism in religious matters. His attempts to revitalize the Atmiya Sabha provoked hostility. Very few made serious efforts to investigate into the basic differences, or to understand the usefulness of the reforms heralded by Rammohun and his colleagues. His genuine fight for justice was misconstrued as anti-Hinduism. His frank pronouncements aroused much fury.

Meanwhile, the Unitarian Society of the Christians functioned in a hall attached to the *Harkara*

Building. The aim of the institution was not detrimental to any section of the society. Rather, charity and benevolence were part of its programme. Mr. William Adam, apart from looking after the Church, was the Chief Convenor of the Association for which he worked with steady faith. Rammohun and his friends often guided him in vital matters. Accompanied by his sons and a few close friends, Rammohun attended the services regularly. Apart from Dwarkanath and Prasanna Kumar Tagore, Tarachand Chakrabarty and Chandrasekhar Dev, two enthusiastic young men, had the highest regard for all liberal organizations and gave full support to Rammohun whenever an important issue arose. They had genuine admiration for the pioneer. At the end of the Church service Rammohun was often accompanied by Tarachand and Chandrasekhar on his way home. One evening Dev remarked, "Why not have a prayer hall of our own? Is it necessary that we should go to the foreigners for our prayers?" Rammohun took it up immediately. After consulting his friends Ram Kamal Basu, better known as Firingi Kamal a room could be hired for the Atmiya Sabha from Ramkamal Basu, better known as Firingi Kamal Basu, who offered a room on a reasonable rent. Ram Kamal Basu, having worked with the Europeans for a long time, earned this name for himself. In 48 Chitpore Road, the Brahmo Sabha started functioning from 20 August 1828 (6 Bhadra). The Brahmo Sabha or Samaj to this day observes the anniversary of the inaugural meeting which is known as the 'Bhadrotsava.' On Saturdays the prayer meetings were held from 7 p.m. to 9 p.m. Two Telegu Brahmin pandits recited from the Vedas. Portions from the Upanishad were read out by Utsavananda Vidyavagish while Ramchandra Vidyavagish translated the verses into Bengali. Tarachand Chakarbarty, a spirited member of the Young Bengal, was elected the first secretary. The services were attended by several Hindu devotees who appreciated the sober and peaceful atmosphere of the gatherings. This was the beginning of the Brahmo Sabha or Brahmo Samaj. The prayer meetings of the Atmiya Sabha culminated in the Brahmo Sabha. To many a person the word "Brahmo" remained vague, for they often confused it with a Brahmin. Those who worship Brahman "The Supreme Being", are Brahmos—this had to be made clear. For a couple of years the community prayers were held regularly at this place until it was decided that the Brahmo Sabha should have a proper building of its own.

On 23 January 1830, the Brahmo Samaj started functioning in the new building in the Jorasanko area of Calcutta, known in those days as Sutanuti. The inaugural ceremony known as the *Maghotsava* is celebrated every year with hymns, sermons and readings from Upanishad. Members of the Samaj take part in discussion meetings which are followed by social and intellectual intercourse. The Bengali weekly *Tattakaumudi* is published by the Samaj. *Modern Review* is one of the best known journals founded and edited in the early days by the late Shri Ramananda Chattapadhaya. It is still regarded as an informative journal, but one misses the valuable contributions of Shri Ramananda. There is a library with a good collection of books. A simple community meal is shared by the people present at the celebrations of Maghotsava. The hymns sung at the services are known as the 'Brahmo Sangit.' The songs sung at the Brahmo Samaj meetings were first compiled by Rammohun, a collection of devotional songs composed by worshippers of the Supreme Being. A large number of songs have been composed in the course of several years by Rabindranath and other Tagores. Atul Prasad Sen, Rajani Kanto Sen, Trailakya Sanyal, Dwijendranath, Sitanath Tattabhusan, Sukumar Roy and many others have contributed some of the best hymns. Hemlata Devi, Kamini Roy and Nirupama Devi's are popular. The songs are in praise of the Universal God who as a friend, companion, and protector reigns perpetually in the heart of the devotee. The collection today consists of a small number of Kabir's, Nanak's and Mirabai's bhajans as well. Vedic verses in original and in a form of translation occupy a special place. Some of the songs are based on classical tunes, some on mixed ragas. The tunes are solemn. They are recited or sung during the interval between the prayers. The book of devotional songs now consists of more than a thousand songs. The service is divided into four sections—the invocation, prayer, meditation and sermons. The songs are sung in between.

The conception of Church music was very vague in the days when Rammohun started the Samaj. Singers from various sections of the society were invited on some occasions. The songs sung by them were unsuitable. Rammohun made it clear that only the hymns sung in praise of the Universal God would be appropriate for the services. Hence Brahmo Sangit came into vogue. Numerous members were inspired to compose the theistic hymns. Although the serene atmosphere of the Brahmo Samaj attracted a large number of enlightened Hindus, the orthodox section did not cease attacking the non-conformist organization. Most damaging statements were circulated with utter cynicism. The Brahmos were referred to as outcastes, bigots, pseudo Christians, anti-socials and atheists. Breaking away from the age-old traditions of the dormant society was not an easy task; the leaders and members of the Samaj had to face violent opposition. However, the orthodox Hindu society absorbed the reforming spirit of the Samaj. Time alone has cleared these doubts.

The opening of the Brahmo Sabha in 1830 created both conflict and tension in people's mind. The orthodox Hindus organized a rival body known as the Dharma Sabha. The Dharma Sabha declared that its purpose was to preserve the traditional Hindu way of life. Its leader was Radhakanto Dev of the Shova Bazaar zamindar family addressed as "Gosthipati"—preserver of Hindu orthodox rites. He took the lead to denounce the Brahmo Samaj and its progressive reforms. The Dharma Sabha consisted of a large number of wealthy Hindus who did not care to liberate women, nor give security to the widows. Judged by modern standards they were social reactionaries.

All liberal and progressive ideas were condemned by them. Suttee was openly supported by them in the name of Hindu Dharma. An anti-abolition squad organized by them started working with unusual zeal.

Countrywide tumult and clamour baffled the Unitarian Christians, when Rammohun took the initiative to give a typical Hindu Unitarian form to the Brahmo Sabha. He took his stand on the ground of monotheism. The aim of the Brahmo Sabha was made perfectly clear when the Trust Deed was drawn up by Rammohun. It is a unique document for its universalistic approach to religion and humanitarian appeal. Three basic questions are raised namely: (a) who will be worshipped? (b) who will be the devotee? (c) what is the line of conducting the service? The answer are clearly stated in the Trust Deed.

> The Trustees shall at all times permit the same building...for place of public meeting of all sorts and descriptions of people without distinction, as shall behave and conduct themselves in an orderly, sober, religious and devout manner, for the worship and adoration of the Eternal, Unsearchable, and Immutable Being who is the Author, and Preserver of the Universe... and... no object, animate nor inanimate, that has been, or is, or shall hereafter become or be recognised an object of worship, by any man, or set of men, shall be reviled or slightingly or contemptuously spoken of, or alluded to, either in preaching, praying, or in hymns, or other

> mode of worship. . .to the promotion of the Charity, morality, piety, benevolence, virtue and the strengthening the bonds of union between men of all religions persuasions and creeds.

This explains that the Brahmo Sabha did not proclaim any new creed, or form any particular sect. Rammohun did not create a new religion. What he tried to convey to his countrymen was that idolatory had nothing to do with Hindu worship. Hinduism, he pointed out, was based on the concept of the formless Brahmin—the Supreme Being, *Ekamevadwityam*—the one without a second.

That Rammohun attempted to reinstate the truth in Hinduism was a significant contribution. That he welcomed men irrespective of caste or creed to participate in the devotional practices was a logical conclusion. We shall observe again and again that Rammohun made every effort to claim the basic unity in all religions. The universalism preached by ancient sages was revived by him. His was not a new creed, only his approach was novel. His accent was on the common tie binding all religions—the tie of universalism and monotheism: whatever religion they might profess.

* * *

In recollecting the profound views of eminent religious leaders of the past, we are reminded of the fact that each of them had upheld a particular concept or theme which has been handed over from one generation to the other. These ideas have inspired millions of people, through endless generations. Lord Buddha's message was to respect the "Sangha" – Brotherhood of Man. The divine dimensions emerging from the Upanishad is the identity of the individual soul with the Universal Soul or Brahma. Jesus Christ promised Heaven on Earth and taught us to "love thy neighbour as thyself." Mohammed preached the worshipping of one God. Martin Luther upheld the value of freedom in religious thoughts. Chaitanya the greatest devotee of sixteenth century Bengal, believed in self-surrender to the Divine and unconditional love for mankind.

Rammohun believed in the worship of a Universal God–the infinite benefactor of the universe. He wanted to find a place for the worship of the Universal God. That he found it imperative to open a meeting place for devotees of all faiths, made him a pioneer in creating a harmony in religions. The idea of a prayer hall for the public was not known to the Hindus. He brought the worshippers together. Chaitanya tried to give a similar shape to community prayers by introducing the songs of the Vaishnava Padavalis. The Kirtan songs did unite the Brahmin and the outcaste; the elite and the down-trodden; the Hindu and the Muslim devotee. But the effusiveness of the Radha-Krishna cult practically destroyed the spiritual depth of the movement started by Chaitanya. Excessive emotionalism of a gathering of devotees destroyed the spirit in which Sri Chaitanya had originally worshipped the Universal God.

Rammohun, the harbinger of the modern age in

India, was aware of the dangers of emotionalism. The Brahmo Sabha through the Upanishadic prayers and hymns introduced discipline and sobriety. The main idea was to eradicate intolerance and to put a restraint on any irrational expression.

But why did Rammohun give a Hindu form to the Unitarian worship? The fact that the Vedas were read out by a Brahmin and the slokas paraphrased caused a certain amount of doubt that he was upholding Hinduism. At that crucial moment acceptance and rejection of the fundamental principles gave rise to conflicts. India was succumbing to the influence of the Christian Missionaries. Rammohun thought it necessary to restore India's faith in the original Hindu scriptures. The liberal Hindus and the Christians understood each other better. The Trust Deed, so elaborately constructed, cleared all doubts. The liberal members of the Hindu society who were groping for a constructive path now found a worthy leader. Even though a small number of people joined the prayers, they belonged to various communities. The Trust Deed, therefore, does not contradict the principles of the Brahmo Samaj.

Mr. Robert Montgomery Martin, Editor of the *Bengal Herald,* the only European present at the opening of the Brahmo Sabha gives an interesting account. "There were about five hundred Hindus present and among them many Brahmins who after the prayers and singing of hymns had been concluded, received gifts in money to a considerable extent."

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The year 1830 is marked by Alexander Duff's arrival in Calcutta from the Church of Scotland. Duff was ushered into Rammohun's house in the suburb of Calcutta where they discussed the prospects of education for the Indians. All true education, Rammohun commented, should be based on religious faith since the aim of education was to have an all-round development of the mental faculties of mankind. Naturally he agreed that every educational institution should start the day's work with a prayer. He also remarked that having read about the rise and progress of Christianity, in apostolic times, and its corruption in succeeding ages, and then of the Christian Reformation which shook off these corruptions and restored it to its pristine purity, he began to think that something similar must take place in India, and that similar results must follow the reformation of the popular idolatry. Rammohun took up the cause of the young missionary. He offered Duff a room previously occupied by the Brahmo Sabha which had now shifted to the new building. Having rented it at a normal rate, Duff started a school. Rammohun and his followers collected a small group of pupils for Duff's new school. The number increased gradually. Some of the boys who studied in Duff's school turned out to be exceptionally bright and well-behaved. Rammohun continued to help the young educationist through whom the cause of a broader education was being fulfilled. But the orthodox section did not remain quiet. They protested against the teaching of the Gospel of Jesus. Rammohun argued that the knowledge of Hinduism did not convert a Christian into a Hindu nor did the knowledge of the Bible convert a Hindu into a Christian.

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Although the Trust Deed of the Brahmo Sabha gave a call to all Hindus to join the association, only the liberal Hindus responded. The orthodox section refused to consider the ideology of the Samaj with an unbiased mind. Whoever attended the meetings was ostracized by the orthodox leaders. Young men taking interest in the Samaj were disowned by the parents. The campaign for the abolition of Suttee sponsored by the Samaj was particularly looked down upon with disapproval. It was mentioned as an act of treachery. The *Sambad Chandrika* the organ of the orthodox section, began pouring venom on the followers of Rammohun. Bhabani Charan Banerjee who helped Rammohun in starting *Kaumudi* left him as he would not oppose Suttee. Later he joined the *Chandrika* as the editor. The Dharma Sabha as a rival group was supported by the wealthy orthodox elite. The Brahmo Sabha and the Dharma Sabha were contrasts in every way. The members of the Brahmo Samaj volunteered a series of progressive reforms including abolition of child-marriage, polygamy and caste persecution. It also had plans to provide education for women so as to give them a proper status in the society. Although the Samaj had a few leaders from amongst the affluent, the educated middle class actually became interested in its progress. The Young Bengal took particular interest to get acquainted with Rammohun's broad views. A number of enthusiastic youths like Dakshinaranjan Mukhopadhaya, Ram Gopal Ghosh, Rashik Krishna Mullik, Krishna Mohan Bandhopadhaya organized a regular study circle. They showed courage and initiative when the country needed more drastic changes. They floated the most progressive journals, amongst which the *Enquirer*, *Bengal Spectator*, *The Quill*, and *Gyanennashan* were popular.

As an organization, the Brahmo Sabha was not in any way prosperous. Struggling through numerous hazards and hindrances, it was striving to attain stability without antagonizing the public. But its very motto of liberalism infuriated the staunch Hindu section represented by the Dharma Sabha. They were determined to take a violent dislike to the individual members as well as the body as a whole.

The leader of the Dharma Sabha, Radhakanto Dev, was a man of property and certain intellectual prowess. He was the compiler of the Sanskrit dictionary *Sabdakalpadruma* in seven volumes which is considered to be a monumental work. But in his outlook he was very conservative. Any semblance of Western thought or liberalism gave him cause for panic. He was, therefore, an aggressive rival of Rammohun who fought mainly for men's liberty including emancipation of women. At a meeting held by the Hindus of Calcutta, Radhakanto stood up and thanked Lord Hastings particularly for protecting the orthodox practice of

Suttee. Radhakanto was almost fanatic in opposing the abolition of Suttee. The Dharma Sabha meetings were marked by pomp and grandeur. On the days the members of the orthodox camp held their meetings, the roads were crowded with endless carriages, anxious passersby and spectators. The streets resounded with threats to burn down the Brahma Sabha and assasinate Rammohun. The leaders of the Dharma Sabha dressed themselves up elegantly in fine clothes, ordered the best sweets at the confectionaries, while the page boys gaped at the restless "Raja Babus" from a distance. The humble shops sold the best sweets and paid homage to the top guardians of the society.

Public opinion could easily be created against the Brahmo Sabha due to the ignorance of the people. The man in the street heard strange stories about emancipation of the women. He was horrified. He heard that the widow was going to live again and perhaps happily. He were scandalised. Finally it was decided that the Dharma Sabha would fight against such bizarre ideas and the abolition of Suttee. Radhakanto was capable of taking a ruthless stand. He advised the members to oppose Rammohun on all issues, especially on the issue of Suttee.

Radhakanto's feelings of animosity developed so intensely that he was unable to appreciate the merits of reform like the abolition of Suttee. A sharp vindictiveness engulfed his entire personality so violently that he became determined to destroy the Brahmo Sabha. With all his influence, men and money, he failed to win over Lord Bentinck. His appeal to the King-in-Council also failed because his agent Bathie did not succeed in his efforts. As the abolition of Suttee could not be repealed by the Dharma Sabha, the confidence of the members of the Dharma Sabha was much shaken at the end. Bengal was aroused in favour of progress in all possible spheres.

Radhakanto showed positive signs of narrow-mindedness although his shrewd commonsense foresaw the evils inherent in a slavish imitation of the West. Nonetheless, as the leader of the reactionary zamindars, he could not understand the ignited spirit of nineteenth century Bengal. For a long time he remained active in educational institutions mainly to oppose any modern line of thought. Radhakanto for years had total disregard for European education. The Young Bengal was not prepared to accept his leadership. Rammohun's idea of the synthesis of Western and Eastern educational systems proved to be more practical; the ball of fire had already started rolling. Freedom of thought, freedom of press, intellectual diligence, and literary idealism had captured the vision of the youth. Brahmo Samaj as a pioneer organization played its vital but modest role. The Adi Brahmo Samaj opened by Debendranath, the Nababidhan Samaj established by Keshav Chandra Sen—all culminated in the Sadharan Brahmo Samaj which had become the mainstream of progress, philanthropy and education. The Brahmo Samaj organizations in the South, in Maharashtra, in Simla and in New Delhi have a similar programme of propagating liberal thoughts, spiritual studies and philanthropy. Gradually the country was awakening from deep slumber. Still the majority amongst the orthodox remained self-centred and conservative. They preferred to support separate standards for men and women. Only a handful believed in liberating the persecuted outcastes, and the pathetic widows. A revolutionary change in the society impressed many more students of the Hindu College who continued to fight for many more specific changes. Iswar Chandra Vidyasagar, Maharshi Debendranath, Keshav Chandra Sen, Shivnath Sastri, Ananda Mohan Bose, were amongst the very well-known reformers who took up the cause of widow-remarriage, education and philanthropy.

The story of the Brahmo Sabha gives us a glimpse of nineteenth-century Bengal which is one of the most interesting periods of Indian history and in which Rammohun played the role of the pathfinder. Dwarkanath was responsible for propagating the liberal thoughts of Rammohun. After Rammohun's demise Maharshi Debendranath revived the Samaj. Santiniketan welcomed people from every country. Universalism was upheld by the poet Rabindranath through literature and sermons. Both Debendranath and Rabindranath were inspired by Rammohun and his thoughts.

SEVEN

THE CHAMPION OF LIBERTY

> *"The respect which is purchased with a hundred drops of heart's blood, do not thou, in the hope of a favour, commit to the mercy of a porter."*
>
> —PERSIAN COUPLET

RAMMOHUN CAME to Calcutta in 1815 when journalism was still a hazardous enterprise. With endless restrictions and hardly any competant journalists joining the profession, the sensitive intelligentsia shuddered at its tricky overlay and persecutions. But the problems of the press interested Rammohun deeply because the "love of freedom was perhaps his strongest passion" as William Adam mentioned in his tribute to Rammohun. It makes us think, why was he not contented with what he possessed? Security, piety and learning, and the many fine qualities of a genteel scholar! The fact was that any form of irrational rigidity clashed with his personal freedom and the conflict made him seek liberty of the soul and intellect. Naturally, he rebelled from his childhood against the suppression of free thinking, and the religious dogmatism of the priests. So many impeding restrictions! Knowing very well that irrational repressive measures could be detrimental to man's freedom in a society, he was eager to express his independent views by reasoning out his arguments. Struggle came to him in the form of a wild storm. The path he chose for his outlet needed serious study and conviction; faith in mankind, and ample courage. Intellectual freedom, he believed, was man's basic right, just as fundamental rights were. The press, he observed, was one of the most powerful weapons which could enliven public opinion. To him, its freedom was imperative. He was eager to follow the history of its long struggle, and also study the point of view of the previous editors. He was willing to respect the policy of the Government, not without protest if it was necessary.

In studying the background of the Indian press and its relationship with the pressmen, one gets an idea of how much the Company Government was determined to curtail the freedom of the press. In the early years Rammohun was not fully aware of the Company's limited vision, for he seldom faced difficulty in publishing his views with regard to reforms. He was not treated unsympathetically as his own standard of rectitude was much higher than that of the usual run of editors. Most editors were irresponsible. As a writer, Rammohun stated his opinions directly in spite of strong opposition, because he took particular care to publish only thought-provoking articles. Slandering or slighting individuals was not the purpose of his publications. But it took him by surprise to discover that the press was regarded as a danger to the Government. The attitude of the Administration was more hostile than he took it to be. They were not even co-operative, for the liberty that was granted was not spontaneous. The enigma surrounding the sort of liberty they offered was so dubious that Rammohun soon came into conflict with the Government policy. That his predecessors had undergone menacing ordeals was discovered by Rammohun in a short time. But he was not afraid to stand up for the rights of the pressman, although the attitude of the Company officials was deplorable.

Swinging back to the days of adventure, it is interesting to recapture what little freedom the journalist enjoyed. Recollecting the days of *Hicky's Gazette* which was floated on 29 January 1780, it is to be noted that Hicky was the first man to realize the value of "news". Hicky was neither a litterateur, nor a journalist. It is not surprising therefore that he believed in presenting sensational news, pungent sarcasm, petty gossip and juicy scandal. This may not be regarded as a virtue in an intellectual, but it was a necessary qualification for a veteran journalist. He apparently acquired the techniques of reporting half-truths, and boldly took refuge in personal attacks. The remarkable quality of this adventurer was that he had a boundless love for personal freedom. As a free citizen he wanted full independence to express himself in black and white: and not in vague grey lines. "What courage and what audacity!" remarked the officials. But was this style of reporting very different from today's journalistic pursuits including the daily news bulletin? Does not the modern newspaper or journal mix and blend the maximum myth with the minimum fact? But those days were days of repression! The newspapers were supposed to boost up only the Government. The Company officials could do no wrong! So also the Company Government, the foreign elite, and their sycophants. James Augustus Hicky was no St. Francis of Assisi, but as far as his persecution in the world of journalism was concerned, he was under fire. "Brother fire, God made you beautiful and strong and useful, I pray you be courteous," G. K. Chesterton writes about the Little Poor Man in St. Francis of Assisi. Tortured by the Government, Hicky remarked, "I have no propensity, I was not bred to a slavish life of hard work. Yet I take a pleasure in enslaving my body in order to purchase freedom for my mind and soul!" He implored the Company Government to be courteous, but he refused all offers of bribes, open or secret. Although Hicky was physically crushed his soul remained free.

Pointing at the press gallery of the House of Commons, Burke remarked, "Yonder sits the Fourth Estate!" Soon after the Industrial Revolution, the democratic social forces created an alert middle class striving to attain emancipation in every sphere. The bourgeoise was born from an ambition to monopolize trade with India. As all foreign invaders cherish the desire to explore and exploit, the East India Company's subtle methods were becoming conspicuous day by day. There were no exceptions. The innate greed of the colonizer is the same everywhere.

"The Indian press was created by those who for various reasons were dissatisfied with the Company's administration and monopoly," said Margarita Barns in *The India Press*. The Waquihnavis (news writer) and the "hircurrahs" could not satisfy the new class of banians, Matsuddis and dewans who served the foreign rulers. Speedy information was a necessity. Market value, business transactions, shipping, technique of administration—various factors aroused fresh curiosity. To have a glimpse of the private lives of the British residents of Calcutta was a novel experience. To read about the ordinary man's outrageous behaviour became fashionable. But the standard of newsmongering was considerably low—rather coarse. Malicious personal attacks, slurs on private life, and unkind conclusions drawn from hectic social intercourse made the news columns almost vulgar. But the reading materials were palatable and popular. The society was to a great extent painted true—the newspaper then being a sort of perverse reflexion of the society and people. The newspaper today has the capacity to conceal or reveal news in a remarkably subtle manner, according to its policy. But that needs a special technique, years of experience and a negative conscience. The bold reporter or editor has to take the burden of unpopularity at times. The hazards of the modern press are different in many ways which cannot be compared with the conditions in the past.

Incidentally the East India Company faced criticisms of the top officials since their private and public lives were discussed freely in the newspapers. Hastings and Clive were not spared. Men holding powerful posts became positively hostile towards the editors misusing their freedom. *Hicky's Gazette* used to have a dig at Hastings frequently, specially when it discussed Hastings' private life! Hicky was arrested and deported. He ultimately died a poor man. But his spirit remains immortal to this day. Journalists can hardly forget his inexhaustible fund of discourse connected with the indignant elite, and their uncivil behaviour. The first man who spoke about the freedom of the press was Hicky. His style of reporting might not have been appreciated by the British officials, but he had inspired the entire realm of journalists long after he disappeared from India. The country was actually groaning under the Company Government's exploitation. That a foreigner should comment on it was remarkably creditable!

The Company officials since then looked down upon journalists with deep contempt and suspicion. The press was very much under repression, and losing all its prestige. However, the Company Administration was keen to start newspapers which would guard the interests of their commercial undertakings. The British Agency Houses, the status of the privileged classes—specially the affluent British rulers.

William Duane, an American of Irish descent, started the *Indian World* in 1794. He was arrested and deported in 1795. Several cases of deportation and arrest of editors created a terror amongst the press men. The authorities of Fort William did not tolerate the irresponsible behaviour of the editors who were not serving their political purpose. The tone of the press had to be mellowed and moulded to suit the needs of the Administration.

The influence of the French Revolution, the fight for American Independence, and the political upheavals in Europe were stimulating the intelligentsia. Radicalism, love for "liberty, fraternity and equality" all seemed to have culminated in a compatible ideology new to the educated middle class. A desire to become acquainted with the events happening abroad was becoming greater everyday. The printing press could largely meet the demand but not at the cost of lowering the prestige of the British rulers! The Tory Government in Britain was having nightmares of "freedom fighters" circulating in every country. Consequently, the press was subjected to many more restrictions. The pretense of liberalism displayed by the Company Government was a sham affair. It could not be taken seriously by the liberal intelligentsia. But human nature is strange. In spite of such feelings of insecurity and panic, the urge to run a newspaper was not really decreasing. In fact, people were hungry for news. By relinquishing indiscriminate criticism of the Government, editors and proprietors manipulated a circulation of a number of weeklies and newspapers such as the *India Gazette, Bengal Journal, Oriental Magazine* and *Indian World*. But the vigilant eyes of the Fort William authorities roved from corner to corner. The proprietors seldom felt relaxed, for fear and threat often haunted them. Strangely, a spirit of adventure provided them with the necessary courage.

Between 1791-98 several editors were warned, punished and persecuted in various ways. Maclean who had started *Bengal Harkara* came into conflict with the Government and was arrested, later deported to England. Lord Wellesley reacted strongly against the editors as a race, and had little patience with their challenging mockery. He tried to solve the problems by introducing censorship in Bengal. The rules promulgated in 1799 read thus:

(1) Every printer of a newspaper to print his name at the bottom of the paper.
(2) Every editor and proprietor of a paper to deliver in his name and place of abode to the Secretary to the Government.
(3) No paper to be published on Sunday.
(4) No newspaper to be published at all until it shall have been previously inspected by the secretary to the Government or by person authorized by him for that purpose.
(5) The penalty for offending against any of the above regulations to be immediate embarkation for Europe.

Incidentally, Lord Wellesley denied to the Baptist Mission the right to start a press in Calcutta, but they later opened one in Serampore. The Company Government continued to regard editors and proprietors of newspapers as dangerous agents, undesirable and unscrupulous in every way.

Lord Hastings and Lord Bentinck on the other hand had a sort of sympathy for them. But none of the Governors expressed disapproval against sudden deportation of editors for over-stepping their rights. Lord Minto from 1811 put more restrictions. Dr. James Bryce, the first Presbitarian Minister in India, acquired the *Asiatic Journal* in 1814 and became the editor. Mr. John Adam, then the Chief Secretary, came into serious conflict with Bryce. Bitter antagonism developed between the two. Lord Hastings had also personal dislike for Bryce. Frankly at the root of all such controversies was a deep resentment against the press whose freedom was considered the most dreaded thing. Heatley, proprietor of the *Morning Post* published in Calcutta, was dictated to submit to a censor by the Government. But Heatley being born of a European father and an Indian mother could not be deported as other British editors. Bryce and Heatley both showed courage and continued to fight for their rights. Lord Hastings gradually felt that editors could be given the responsibility provided they agreed to follow the rules added to the former regulation. In place of ruthless censorship a direct vigilance was kept over all printed matter. Despite all repressive measures, the press in Bengal could not be put into a strait-jacket. The Bengali citizen was so eager for news that the reports on the struggles of the press were keenly followed by a large number of readers. But the proprietors were still struggling for more freedom.

The English journals edited and owned by Europeans stood for European interests. *The India Gazette, The Bengal Journal, The Oriental Magazine* and the *Indian World* were amongst the favoured ones. The first weekly paper in Bengali was the *Vangal Gazette* started in 1816. Gangadhar Bhattacharya, an enthusiastic member of the Atmiya Sabha, was the editor. Rammohun published his first tract against Suttee in the *Vangal Gazette.* The journal was in existence till 1820. The Serampore Missionaries started *Digdarshan* in 1818 –a Bengali magazine for the youth. In a short time, they started *Samachar Darpan* for furthering the cause of Christianity. It also showed interest in social and cultural issues.

Rammohun was a man of dignity and pride. Naturally, he would not submit to humiliating restraints which editors and proprietors of newspapers were expected to suffer silently. Although he resented Governmental control, he was not unaware of the fact that most editors lacked propriety. Rammohun was a keen observer of events at home and abroad, and was preparing to launch his campaign against Suttee and some other harmful customs. The attitude of the British administrators became less aggressive with the numerous political changes taking place in European politics as well as in the expansion of the British power in India. The British enterprise thrived day by day. Lord Hastings was contemplating on liberating the press to some extent. He even suggested that editors need not submit each copy before publication for the approval of the Government. Except the *Asiatic Journal* which gave an unconditional support to the interests of the Company, editors felt hardly confident to publish their views frankly. Nevertheless, the press was partially liberated as the censorship and precensorship were not demanded. The atmosphere thus created gave fresh enthusiasm to start liberal newspapers.

A brilliant and flamboyant character, James Silk Buckingham, appeared on the scene. Doubtless he was exceptionally sharp in assessing the approach of the Company officials. He was willing to sell ideas to foreign countries and establish his own views. Though opposite in many ways, two eminent personalities who captured attention in the journalistic world were Buckingham and Rammohun. The common factor which brought them together was a journalistic flair and an aversion to the bureaucratic censorship on publishing. Both Buckingham and Rammohun worked diligently to improve the standard of journalism. They believed in freeing it from the shackles of thoughtless officials working under the pressure of Tory diehards perpetually denouncing all forms of liberalism. On 22nd September, 1818, Buckingham published "prospects of a new newspaper" to be entitled "The Calcutta Journal or Political Commercial or Literary Gazette." The *Calcutta Journal* made a dramatic appearance. The first issue published a quotation from Bacon which gave a sudden jolt to the Company officials. "A forward retention of custom is turbulent a thing as innovation and they that reverence too much old times are but a scorn to the new." Buckingham explained the editor's function "as a sacred right to admonish governors of their duties, to warn them furiously of their faults and to tell disagreeable truths." Its pungent sarcasm and blatant criticism of the administration made the *Calcutta Journal* extremely palatable to the readers. However, the resentment from the Government became stronger. *John Bull,* its rival started in 1821, took up a hostile attitude towards the *Calcutta Journal.* Meanwhile Buckingham's old critic Bryce became the editor of *John Bull.* Buckingham's defiant pen exposed a great deal about the East India Company's high-handedness, nepotism and oppression of the Natives. An incident about Dr. Jameson as Superintendent of Medical School of Indians already holding three more posts was mentioned in the *Calcutta Journal.* Jameson became furious. John Adam, the Acting-Governor, took exception to the disclosure of the news and demanded Buckingham's immediate deportation. Buckingham and Jameson fought a duel with pistols to decide on the point of honour. Both came out unhurt.

The indomitable Buckingham was not afraid of threats even when the Government filed a criminal libel suit against him. Having spent £600, he won the case. Confident of his own abilities and the support of the readers, Buckingham did not hesitate to mention a series of irregularites practiced by the Government. As the Secretaries of the Department wore green coats, Buckingham called them the "Gangrene of the State." His flippant wit created serious antagonism. On 12 February 1823 an order was served on Buckingham cancelling his licence to reside in India from 15 April 1823. The paper now had a circulation of 1,000 which fetched him an annual income of about £8,000. Following Buckingham's departure, Adam became particularly cautious. The Press was muzzled once again. Buckingham started the *Oriental Herald* in England, and through his editorials exposed the numerous misdeeds of the Company's rule in India. All through his stay in India, Buckingham remained a close associate of Rammohun because of his admiration for his liberal views and erudition. Both Buckingham and Rammohun are notable names in the journalistic world, for both fought for the freedom of the press.

However, Rammohun believed in keeping good relations with the foreign rulers provided the editor was given a fair deal. He admired Buckingham's fight for liberty and was often touched by his earnest efforts. While in India, Buckingham wrote continuously in favour of the reforms sponsored by Rammohun and his colleagues. His reviews were read by the British residents who felt a sneaking jealousy about the spontaneous affinity that had developed between an Indian and a British subject. The *Calcutta Journal* however did not serve the needs of the larger Bengali reading circle.

Rammohun drifted away from the Baptist Mission Press when his article on Precepts of Jesus was misunderstood and not published. Till 1821 he was closely connected with the Mission Press. The *Sambad Kaumudi* was popular with the Bengali readers. It was meant to be the carrier of englightenment and culture—political, social and literary awareness. Buckingham, then holding a special status, took a special interest, going into many details and praised Rammohun's paper profusely. The *Calcutta Journal* also wrote in appreciation of the *Sambad Kaumudi* on 31 January 1822.

> It is some time since we advertised to the existence of this National Newspaper and we return to the subject now, merely to state, that after the publication of nine Weekly Numbers, we still think as favourably of the undertaking as before ....If knowledge is a blessing and ignorance is a curse, a well-conducted Press that dispels the latter and promotes the former must be deserving of our support as the schools and other Public Institutions established for the same purpose, since they are only different branches of the same tree...."

The address to the Bengali public was followed by an impassioned appeal to the Government urging it to establish a seminary for the free education of the children of poor, specially of respectable Hindus. The *Calcutta Journal* gave full support.

The *Harkara* on the other hand attacked Rammohun's paper. Buckingham defended it. He thought it was a model of moderation. The fact that Rammohun did not follow the examples of the docile editors gave rise to some petty jealousy. *Harkara, Asiatic Journal,* and *Calcutta Monthly Journal* echoed the reactionary views of the Company Government. The *Sambad Kaumudi* (Moon of Intelligence) was practically run by Rammohun but the editor who helped him was Bhabani Charan Banerjee. When Rammohun expressed his views against Suttee, Bhabani Charan did not support him. He left him abruptly, and started a rival weekly *Sambad Chandrika* (Moonlight of Intelligence) sponsored by the conservatives. Rammohun launched *Mirat-ul-Akhbar* (Mirror of News) a weekly journal in Persian. The *Mirat* was read with deep interest, the standard was higher than usual. A larger number of his countrymen were now prepared to share his liberal views. He welcomed the Muslim intelligentsia to share the joys of a free press. *Mirat-ul-Akhbar* was launched on 12 April 1822. Buckingham immediately took special interest to translate the Prospectus. He wrote: "The Editor, we are informed, is a Brahmin of high race, a man of liberal sentiments and by no means deficient in loyalty, well-versed in Persian language, and possessing a competent knowledge of English. . . ."

The *Mirat* (Mirror of News) made an impact on the readers. The *Kaumudi* and the *Mirat* together kept the reading public fairly informed about the daily events, literary progress and general knowledge. The *Mirat* offered a certain standard of intellectual maturity. Its editorials, mostly written by Rammohun, were on political, social, religious and philosophical questions. It also published news and commentaries on international events. In one of the issues it dealt with the Irish Civil War which inspired Indians to contemplate on a national struggle. In his inimitable style the editor made an appeal to the Indian citizen to help the victims of the famine in Ireland.

Both the *Kaumudi* and the *Mirat* took up the cause of the down-trodden, and created a national consciousness amongst the Indians. Rammohun's aim was clear. He used the journals as organs of propaganda which ranged from criticizing caste rigidity, oppression of widows to reporting national risings and revolutions, from satire to serious discussions, from polemic to pungent wit and humour. There was never a dull issue. The *Chandrika* took full advantage to criticize Rammohun, his associates and the progressive reforms. An enlightened section of the Young Bengal who were moderate but serious in purpose, supported Rammohun. The highly emotional section amongst the misguided youth created an uproar and a countrywide misunderstanding. Modern ideas with lofty principles influenced a section of the educated middle class which started many more journals and weeklies in the course of time. Bengal holds a record of publishing the largest number of newspapers and journals during this period. The tradition has not changed since then.

Rammohun found little support in running the newspapers, although, according to the prevailing standard, circulation of his paper was quite large. *John Bull*, the conscience keeper of the Company Government, continuously provoked the officials against Rammohun and his publications. Rammohun's close association with Buckingham was not looked upon with grace, specially by the Governor-General's council. The Chief Secretary thoroughly disliked Buckingham's bold criticism of the bureaucratic set-up and Rammohun supporting him. Bayley accused the *Mirat-ul-Akhbar* of acting against the Government's interest.

John Adam's determination to suppress the press remained persistant. The ordinance known as Adam's Gag reads thus:

> Henceforth, no one should publish a newspaper or a periodical without having obtained a licence from the Governor-General-in-Council, signed by the Chief Secretary. The application for licence should give the name or names of the printer and publisher, of the proprietors, their place of residence, the location of the press and the title of the newspaper, magazine, register, pamphlet, or other printed book or paper.

The penalty for overlooking the rules would be a fine or imprisonment. Rammohun could not stand the tone of the new regulation. It was obvious that those editors who would never raise a voice against any injustice, would have the privilege to start a newspaper. Any independent man therefore would be turned down. Under these conditions Rammohun found it humiliating to continue publishing his journals. The fact that the Government could at any time deny the right of publishing was enough reason to feel offended. A petition was filed by Rammohun and his five colleagues – Dwarkanath, Prasanna Kumar Tagore, Harchandra Ghosh, Gouri Charan Banerjee, Chandra Kumar Tagore and Rammohun himself – to protest against the cancelling of licence. The petition was rejected by the Supreme Court. But Rammohun refused to take things lying down. The day the judgement was pronounced by the Supreme Court, he closed down the *Mirat* as a protest. The memorable editorial quoted in Persian read thus: "The honour that has been purchased at the cost of hundred drops of blood of the heart, O sire, do not sell that honour to the door-keeper for hoping to get favour." The struggle for freedom of the press started since then. The spirit shown by Rammohun explains his strong will and high standard of rectitude.

Newspapers in Bengali and other Indian languages were started with fresh enthusiasm: *Oqdurt Martund* (Hindi) in 1826; *Banga Doot* in 1829. Parsi and Hindustani newspapers were started by Hurrihur Dutt; *Bengal Herald* (in English) was started by Dr. R. M. Martin in 1829. The *India Gazette* appeared in 1820. *John Bull* was finally bought over by Stocqueter, a friend of Dwarkanath Tagore. It was renamed the *Englishman* and was run according to the advice of the intelligent liberals. All through the fight for a free press Dwarkanath gave full support to Rammohun. In fact Dwarkanath and Rammohun both realized how important it was to educate the people and provide them with a sense of responsibility to modernize India. Political thoughts were propagated through the newspapers and the message of patriotism broadcast through their columns. The press in Bengal is indebted to both Rammohun and Dwarkanath Tagore. For several years Rammohun struggled alone until he found a faithful colleague and follower in Dwarkanath.

EIGHT

PROTEST AGAINST EXPLOITATION

"The nation can no longer be a
prey of the few
who used to fill their purses at
the expense, nay,
to the ruin of the people...."
—RAMMOHUN TO RATHBONE

THE ECONOMIC climate of India under the sway of the East India Company was not conducive enough to any progressive pursuits for the Indian populace. The foreign traders were interested in subtle plunder and commercial profits to which the elite were tempted to join. Expansion of British trade attracted a number of money conscious Bengali and non-Bengali citizens. The banian's influence was predominant. The conception of the word "planning" was unknown in those days. Neither the ruler nor the ruled visualized its significance. Besides, the Company officials were well aware of their unlimited powers over the native population. But their air of good will and philanthropy nearly convinced the elite and the ignorant masses that the country was benefiting under the British rule. A diffident multitude was almost doped into accepting the stupor. The British penetrated easily without facing any opposition as the decaying Muslim rule had robbed the native population of all energy and aspiration.

The negligence of the Muslim rulers, the insecurity created by the Hindu priests and the gradual capture of power by the Company Government were factors that led to a dangerous state of affairs. The urban elite in close connivance with petty merchants made huge fortune which they displayed shamelessly during weddings or *sradh* ceremonies. The rural areas being neglected, the skilled labourers became poorer and ultimately landed in Calcutta to seek employment. The man who raised his voice against the despotism of the Company Government was Rammohun. Most of the zamindars were willing to accept the terms thrust upon them by the Company rulers. The demands of the foreign traders were seldom turned down by the ambitious upstarts whose self-interest coincided with the ambitions of the British merchants. The orthodox intelligentsia, still harping on the ancient beliefs and traditional customs, quarrelled over unimportant matters. They never gave thought to the serious problems facing the country. In fact they stood as hindrances to progress. The East India Company found it suitable in every way to exercise maximum authority over the ignorant masses; it was easy to exploit and rule over a disunited people. Caste and creed created so much disparity that there was no question of love or respect for one another. The thoughtless supporters of caste rigidity and the advocates of superiority of priesthood stood against a handful of reformers. The country was swept under the cross-currents. The enlightened section disheartened by the national decadence was eager to open the doors which had remained closed for decades. The British walked in taking advantage of the situation. From Missionaries to Traders, every foreigner entered the land with some ulterior motive.

Although Rammohun himself belonged to the wealthy class, his observation on the merits and demerits of the Company Government was more correct than others. His analysis of the economic drainage under the British power was based on factual assessment. There were several factors that created a vast disparity amongst the rich and the poor; various types of exploitation having affected the rural population. He emphasized that the zamindars were benefiting by the Permanent Settlement but the plight of the poor cultivators was miserable. In the evidence placed by him before the Parliamentary Committee (1832) he pointed out:

> The conditions of the cultivators is very miserable. They are placed at the mercy of the zamindar's avarice and ambition. Landlords have met with indulgence from governments in the assessment of their revenue while no part of it is extended towards the poor cultivator.

The rent being unreasonably high, the peasants were left with practically nothing for themselves. A reduction of rent, he believed, was absolutely necessary; naturally the question of raising the rent was totally rejected by him.

A good deal of Rammohun's magnanimity and humanism is revealed through his sympathetic comments specially when he suggested that rent-racked ryots should not further be harassed. This was only possible if the zamindars did not raise the rent of the land. He was a strong believer in the cultivator's fundamental rights, and was in favour of a direct settlement with them. A century and a half ago, the entire idea of placing the rights of a cultivator as a basic issue was inconceivable. The majority had no feelings for such rights. A solitary progressive mind was at work. Rammohun recommended a solution which was amazingly modern in outlook! He suggested that an extra tax on luxury goods could balance the decrease in revenue. Employment of Indians as collectors in place of highly-salaried Europeans would relieve the Government's burden of a large expenditure. In many ways the zamindars exploited the peasants. Even when the poor man came to the village markets to sell his crops, he was bullied by the middleman and the buyers to pay the cess. The Company Government, instead of giving protection to the poor peasants, were a party to the exploitation. Rammohun himself being a fairly solvent landlord could have ignored the misdeeds of the petty despots endowed with infinite powers. But he was fully aware of the colossal injustice done to the people for whom there was no representation. A strong voice had to be raised. Rammohun's practical approach to the problems could not be totally dismissed by the foreigners. A handful of enlightened men who appreciated his protest, was willing to give him support at times of crisis.

The salt monopoly of the East India Company was a notorious scandal. Nowhere in the world was such a massive scale of exploitation being practised by a civilized government. Rammohun was not prepared to accept the terms offered by the British. Of all the monopolies held by the Government, the salt monopoly affected the largest number of helpless labourers. Its origin can be traced to the time of Warren Hastings and Clive who converted the trade into a private monopoly. But later the agitations were chiefly against the monopoly in Bengal whereby 1,25,000 labourers or Molunghees were living practically in a state of slavery. For the manufacturing of salt, the Company was employing private agents who, on behalf of the Company, sold large quantities of salt in the markets of Calcutta. But the authorities pleaded that only a limited quantity was being manufactured and sold. To begin with the British enterprise was totally excluded from the salt trade. The Company having sole monopoly allowed a handful of wealthy Indians to share the benefits of a large-scale fradulent deal. The avaricious gentry was won over by the foreign traders. It became obvious that the Company hoarded massive quantities of salt in their warehouses for several months, sometimes, over a year, thus creating an artificial shortage. Consequently the price shot up exhorbitantly high. Smuggling was encouraged indirectly. An actual shortage later led to the consumption of the worst quality of salt. The unscrupulous dealers did not hesitate to sell the adulterated compound which was filthy and inedible. Since the duty imposed on foreign salt was too high for the ordinary man, the Company succeeded in retaining its monopoly. The price of salt was raised to 100 per cent above the normal price. The unfair deal consequently antagonized the British citizens as well. Even they felt that gross injustice was being done to the native consumers whose purchasing power was much less than the Europeans. Gradually an agitation was started in England, by liberal English gentlemen like Mr. J. Crawford, Robert Richards, etc. who took the initiative to protest against the principal monopolies of the East India Company. Pamphlets and articles were published in England which drew the attention of the British public. Those who had worked previously under the Company administration in India now took up India's cause. The British Press published sharp criticism of the British policy in India. Since the controversy was already brewing in England, Rammohun took the opportunity to use his pen which was more powerful than fiery oratories and verbal wars. A letter under the assumed name Ram Horee Dass explains the grievances of the people:

> I proceed without further preface to address the covenanted Salt Officer, Tims, Senior, Junior, etc., etc.
>
> My name is Ram Horee Dass. I pay annually to government a sum of Rs. 120. I am therefore a ten pound freeholder, as you could call it. . . . Did it never occur to you that Rs. 325 per hund-

> red maunds or 3¼ per maund was somewhat too dear when the smugglers would furnish it at one rupee eight annas?.... Did it never occur to you sir, while sporting with our miseries, that it might be therefore the H. C.'s salt Golahs contained so many maunds of unsold salt? We have therefore enough....Fie upon you, sir! ....Show the period when salt has been sold at its natural price. Supply ten families in any village with it. Give your starving workmen at home a full supply of bread and meat at the price they would obtain it without your Corn Laws, and see then if they would consume more of it or not.... And bear ever in mind that at fifty miles only from Calcutta one-third of what is sold to us as salt is dirt and is swallowed as salt. If you continue your mistimed levity, I will publish an analysis of it according to your science of Chemistry and one of the smuggled salt with it (*Government Gazette*, 1 November 1830).

The authorities in England at last took note of Rammohun's repeated questioning. The agitation led to some serious thinking on the part of the Board. But ultimately they submitted a long letter justifying their deplorable salt policy. The report from the Board of Customs, was based on the report from the revenue officers and native landholders. They tried to prove that Rammohun's criticism was not correct, as it was partly emotional. His views were also referred to as impractical. The Government deliberately reported a lie that the dearth was a myth. But Rammohun pointed out that it was the common man who felt the dearth much more than the privileged. He felt that English salt being cheaper should be levied according to the purchasing power of the poor native population. If due to this change a large section of labourers would be out of employment, they should be absorbed in agricultural developments. The Molunghees were one of the most harassed labourers. Having to work under unhygenic conditions they were victims of serious infectious diseases. A peasant's life in an agricultural land could not be worse than that. The Court of Directors, however, did not fully accept the criticism of the salt revenue system. On 2 April 1832 the authorities of the Board of Directors replied elaborately justifying their business proceedings. They insisted that there was no real shortage of salt, and that the price was not too high. Amongst the representatives handling the case, Lord Bentinck did not give his signature. Rammohun was fully supported in his efforts by Dwarkanath Tagore who never hesitated to fight for progressive reforms. Their joint effort often irritated the Company officials who were callous and lacking in foresight. But Rammohun did not stop agitating against Monopoly, and the defective revenue system. Gradually things started moving. On the renewal of the Charter in 1832 a more reasonable attitude was visible. Imported salt was being allowed to be sold in the market. The Parliamentary Select Committee finally supported the anti-monopoly stand. Rammohun's persistance finally freed the country from the monstrous salt monopoly of the East India Company. The agitation started by Rammohun gives a glimpse of his concern for the ordinary man. The wide range of reforms undertaken by him makes him a great humanitarian as well as a practical economist.

In discussing the economic drainage of India one cannot overlook the magnitude of exploitation by the British. Rammohun could give a truthful and exact report on the menacing problem. A hundred and fifty years ago the Company officials did not expect an Indian subject either to point out or protest against the malfeasance of the foreign rulers. Rammohun was the first among the natives to draw the attention of the Indian intelligentsia as well as the British officials to the fact that it was in the nature of tribute that huge sums of money were removed to Britain. While answering the questions with regard to the revenue system of India, Rammohun pointed out that Europeans carried colossal sums of money after retirement. Unaccounted money was removed by individuals as well as groups of foreign firms thus draining India's capital in cash and kind.

A sympathetic British servant of the East India Company admitted that the annual remittances to London on account of individuals have been at the rate of nearly two million pounds per annum for a series of years in the past. This amount drawn from tribute, public and private, was enormous.

The East India Company as pioneers in trade laid down the foundation of expansion and exploitation. No foreign ruler enters a strange land from a purely philanthropic spirit. Mere goodwill and benevolence cannot be the sole purpose of any invader. The British rulers obviously came to India with the idea of expansion; exploitation being a part of such policy. We are reminded of the story of Buckingham and the ruler of Egypt, the Pasha. Buckingham tried to sell a brilliant idea — the opening of a new canal which, he explained, would help the Turks in their trading with other countries. The Pasha laughed sceptically. He remarked that he did not believe that any foreign trader would remain passive and help the natives from a purely philanthropic point of view. The British came to India to trade with the people. In the process, the country was nearly sold to the East India Company. If the British were allowed to open a canal, they would surely cast their admiring eyes on the natural beauty of Egypt, covet her natural resources and then transform the people into slaves. Buckingham did not succeed in selling all his ideas as the notoriety of the British imperialism had spread far and wide. As a journalist, he was a critic of the Company Government. But he was a total failure when he pleaded as a British agent.

Since the Muslim rulers in India failed to keep the people together, the country's decadence was rapid. The British in the garb of benevolent well-wishers entered the country practically without any resistance. It being the darkest age for India she had little chance of standing up against the foreigners who made great offers, like education, trade, religious freedom and so many other attractive propositions. Rammohun appreciated their generosity and tried to avail of the opportunities offered by them. Stability had to return. The country had no other option. India was saved from total stagnation. In the process, exploitation was inevitable.

The issue of monopoly and free trade were impending questions. The tussle was creating displeasure amongst the Europeans as well as the Indians. Rammohun supported the free traders against the monopolists and in his effort he was strongly supported by Dwarkanath Tagore. Dwarkanath, a man of extraordinary grit, boldly stated that no company or group should deprive a larger group of the right of trade. Biographers have criticized this standpoint taken up by Rammohun and Dwarkanath. The point is that though the invasion by numerous free traders would ultimately introduce capitalist control and self-interest affecting the poor traders, monopoly was no solution. Rammohun and Dwarkanath realized the importance of representing India in the world map. That India was lagging behind in vital matters and was isolated from the world was a matter of regret. The industrial revolution had changed the entire picture of England. The fact that the British rule had started a sort of industrial revolution in India was in many ways beneficial to Indian interest. Free traders would certainly stimulate a capitalist society but would it be worse than the feudal economy which was already ruining an average man's life? The question was being discussed from various angles. In the cross-currents of the two view points, the feudal economy and the capitalist flow, would India be engulfed by capitalist domination? The historical changes were inevitable. Industrial progress could create an urban population already dreaming of a culture contact with the wider world. The lead was given by Rammohun and Dwarkanath. They encouraged industry, but with dignity and principle. Setting up of industries in Bengal's countryside was sponsored by Dwarkanath. The two idealist reformers did not hesitate to accept the change. This social and economic revolution slowly penetrated into an ancient land, rich in its learning, but timid in its outlook. Swinging back a couple of centuries we are thrown into the midst of total chaos. One admires the foresight of an enlightened scholar striving hard to eradicate prejudice, caste domination and orthodoxy.

The issue of colonization was closely connected with the economic problems, as the future of the Indian villager depended on its success. Rammohun was a realist to the core. He was over-enthusiastic at times, but never pessimistic. He felt that mere mercantile transaction between the foreigners and the affluent section of the natives was not helpful for an all-round progress of the indigenous population. Settlement of Europeans in India could possibly create a deeper understanding between two people, and promote India's industrial progress. Dwarkanath was a great believer in the policy of colonization. A zamindar in his own right, he was aware of the drawbacks of the zamindari system. The joint statement given by Rammohun and Dwarkanath explains the reasons for their supporting colonization. From the speeches of Rammohun and Dwarkanath at a public meeting held in the Town Hall (December 17, 1829), it follows that they pleaded for the abolition of restrictions against colonization. Dwarkanath spoke from his own experience:

> I beg to state that I have several zamindars in various districts, and that I have found the cultivation of indigo and residence of Europeans have considerably benefited the country and the community at large. . . . I do not make this statement merely from hearsay, but from personal observation and experience and I have visited the places referred to repeatedly and in consequence am well-acquainted with the character and manners of the indigo planters. . . .Some years ago when indigo was not generally manufactured, one of my estates where there was no cultivation of indigo did not yield a sufficient income to pay the Government assessment; but within a few years. . .it gave a handsome profit.

Rammohun supported the resolution in the following words:

> I am impressed with the conviction that the greater our intercourse with the European gentlemen, the greater will be our improvement in literary, social and political affairs, a fact which

> can easily be proved by comparing the condition of those of my countrymen who have enjoyed this advantage with that of those who unfortunately have not had that opportunity. There may be some partial injury done by the indigo planters, but on the whole, they have performed more good to the generality of the natives of this country.

In considering the advantages and disadvantages of British colonization in India, Rammohun was not guided merely by emotion. He was able to analyse the risks involved and was apprehensive of the fact that the British could become overbearing. But it was worth contemplating a new venture with maximum goodwill. He advised that a good class of educated Europeans who would treat the Indian subjects with due respect should have preference to settle in the colonies. Colonization was perhaps inevitable, historically determined. A letter written by Rammohun on colonization (14 July 1832) included in the Parliamentary papers (1813-32) gives a detailed study of the problem made by a thoughtful statesman.

The cause of his optimism was his faith in man's innate goodness irrespective of race or creed. He was keen to see India develop industrially along with her progress in the fields of education and culture. The only way of saving the country from sterility was to provide opportunities to join the liberated West. By advocating colonization Rammohun was not endeavouring to please the traders, but trying to stir up a cordial spirit among the countrymen to welcome a healthy stock of people, so that a culture collision could take place and cure the age-old inertia.

Dwarkanath was all in favour of joining hands with the foreign industrialists. The small industrial belt grew rapidly when some of the progressive zamindars, specially the Tagores, took the initiative. Dwarkanath, encouraged by Rammohun, set up small industries in Bengal's countryside. The British capital flowed in from all sides. The rural areas suffered in the process. The peasants were released from persecution by the zamindars, at least to a certain extent. The country was undergoing transition from feudal to capitalist economy. The revolutionary change taking place at the crucial moment was the beginning of a historical process; the people will have to judge it from a distance of more than a century and a half.

NINE

VOYAGE TO ENGLAND AND THE LAST DAYS

> *"The unknown messenger takes*
> *me to the far away to*
> *the shoreless ocean to give my*
> *salutation there. So,*
> *the mind whispers, I am going."*
>
> —TAGORE

IT IS interesting to note that Rammohun was the first amongst the Indians to contemplate a visit to Europe. The prejudice against crossing the seas was far too deep amongst the Hindus. The very thought that a Brahmin was dreaming of landing in a casteless society produced countrywide commotion. Why should a man have such desires unless he was anti-social? Was he a bigot? Why did he support some of the customs prevalent amongst the Muslims and the Christians? People demanded an explanation. The whimsical allegations could not however be taken seriously. He was chosen to be envoy of the Mughal King of Delhi, Akbar the Second. A patriot at heart, a universalist in faith, Rammohun accepted the relevance of creating mutual trust between the two nations. That the East must be presented truly to the West was his vital concern. He felt that a permanent union of the two worlds would help improve the condition of India. In fact, he had waited patiently for an opportunity to visit Europe. But it did not materialize earlier as he wanted to be sure that the reforms were passed without a hitch.

Rammohun was leaving the country as the first emissary of the Mughal King who had implicit faith in the sterling qualities of the scholar. He realized that Rammohun had the aptitude for a statesman and a diplomat, and that he was endowed with courage and determination. He would surely be the best man to handle the intricate problems of the fading Mughals. He could with dignity relate the appalling condition of the people. The King wanted his representative to stand up to the overbearing officialdom of the East India Company for which Rammohun was considered the most suitable. The allowances granted by the British Government to the Mughal King were not sufficient enough for maintaining a reasonable standard of living. Rammohun was expected to persuade the foreign rulers to be more understanding. On this occasion, the Emperor bestowed on his worthy messenger the title of "Raja". The new-found ambassador was pleased to be chosen for the responsible assignment. He was looking forward to his presenting India's case directly to the King-in-Council. But the Company officials drew a long face. They refused to accept him as a formal representative and would not recognize the title bestowed on him by the Mughal King. It was obvious that the Company Government was reluctant to take the risk of seeing Rammohun appearing personally in England. But it mattered little whether the officials recognized his title or not. Rammohun was ready to leave. He was neither complaining nor pleading with the Company, he was asking the Crown for justice. He was placing his case to the British Parliament and the Crown. The Company officials perhaps sensed that Rammohun's arrival in England could lower their prestige, as a good deal of their misdeeds might come out in the open. But Rammohun had no intention of displaying such pettiness. In demanding the fundamental rights and constitutional stability, he had to discuss matters frankly.

His countrymen were intrigued. Rammohun's being selected as an emissary to Europe became a matter for ridicule to some, and annoyance to others. The British officials as well as the Indian educated elite showed flagrant curiosity. Everywhere in Bengal people were commenting on such a venture. In England, on the contrary, the intellectuals and scholars looked forward to Rammohun's visit. They were well acquainted with his theological and scholarly work since some of them had corresponded with him for several years. Distance was such a major drawback in those days that scholars kept in touch with one another through regular correspondence which to a large extent contained intellectual discussions. A feeling of brotherhood developed amongst them although living thousands of miles apart. The good-will created amongst men of letters, helped to build fraternity between nations. Rammohun had ambitions to see the advanced countries and also to meet the people residing in foreign lands. But he was so conscious of his tasks at home that his trip was delayed. He could not leave until his commitments were fulfilled. The reforms had to be seen through. The enlightened self-interest of the Company Government was at times a source of anxiety to the lovers of freedom.

Rammohun had no encouragement from his family members about his plans. In fact his son broke down as he came to know about his father's preparation for a long voyage. Rammohun could not disclose the matter to his wife for fear of upsetting her. His wife came to know about her husband's departure after he had left the shores of India. Later it was a matter of grief to her, for Rammohun did not return. But his indifference to domestic matters developed from the fact that his work was never appreciated by the members of his family. In all his struggles Dwarkanath Tagore and Prasanna Kumar Tagore were his constant companions. Dwarkanath helped him with his clear perception and generosity, Prasanna Kumar with his radical humanism. As far as his family life was concerned, Rammohun was a lonely man, and in public life he was seldom spared derogatory comments. Since he did not believe in pretensions, he was outspoken. Naturally he encountered slander and opposition before and after each campaign. He was familiar with the characteristic criticisms of the residents of Calcutta.

From 1815-30, he worked almost single-handed and without rest. His theological controversies, advocacy of Western education, opening of the schools and colleges—all needed extraordinary effort, both physical and mental. His close association with David Hare and Alexander Duff gave him enough scope to work for the upliftment of the people. Rammohun offered them co-operation, and helped them understand the real need of the people. He fought simultaneously for educational reforms and the freedom of the press. His pioneering work in journalism gave new dimensions to Indian printers and publishers. The men of letters found the linguistic and literary reformation a positive source of inspiration. Youth were inspired by liberal thoughts, their energy was diverted to constructive programmes. Bengal was soon the centre of cultural and literary activities. But the zamindary system, the economic drainage of India and the sad plight of the cultivators still kept him brooding. Rammohun was not a rapacious zamindar; his heart was heavy with thoughts for the under-privileged: the labourers, wage-earners and the uneducated multitude. The picture of a disorganized Hindu society, the apparent segregation of the poor Muslims, haunted him for years. He was genuinely striving for man's freedom and unity. It gave him partial relief to see that some of the vital reforms were successful at last. He was now determined to meet the authorities abroad, speak on behalf of his countrymen and demand justice. He had no peace of mind until he saw the end of Suttee in India. He cherished the desire to see the emancipation of women and was eager to eradicate the numerous evil customs still supported by the educated elite. He believed in women getting facilities for education. Having to handle several issues almost simultaneously, he suffered from great strain. But he was blessed with an exceptionally strong constitution. He seldom lacked in vigour or enthusiasm. Even after the abolition of Suttee was legalized in 1829, the Dharma Sabha was planning to get it repealed. Rammohun was eager to be present in England before any move for repealing the Abolition Act could be made by the Dharma Sabha agent. The establishment of the Brahmo Samaj and the prayer hall opened the path for universal brotherhood. Co-operation with other organizations elevated the spirit of scholars from all over the world. In spite of the fact that the majority of his countrymen did not respond to the reforms sponsored by the Samaj, the enlightened Hindu intelligentsia enjoyed the benefits. He knew that in course of time his colleagues would be able to educate the unenlightened majority as to what was good and necessary for themselves. It was the responsibility of the educated class in Bengal to eradicate the harmful traditions. To achieve this Rammohun tried to rouse the intelligentsia. In later years the effects of progressive reforms became more concrete as Bengal led the other provinces in many spheres. Rammohun believed that a large number of liberal men who supported him were also looking forward to his visit abroad. The conservative leaders were merely obsessed with meaningless customs mostly to fulfil self-interest. A small group genuinely cared to fight for the progress of the country, whom Rammohun had inspired. Pandit Ram Chandra Vidyabagish continued to act as the minister of the Brahmo Samaj which became rather insignificant after Rammohun left for England. Many associate members gradually left the Samaj. Most of them were indifferent to future plans. Several years passed by until Maharshi Debendranath Tagore, Dwarkanath's son, joined the Samaj in 1843 as a follower of Rammohun and a devoted Brahmo. Debendranath along with a number of monotheists was initiated into the Samaj. The ceremony took place on 7 Paush in Santiniketan (23 December). The Brahmo Samaj was reorganized under the leadership of Debendranath. It was no longer the same old universal association that Rammohun had established; it was transformed into a Hindu Unitarian Samaj which appealed to a wider section of the people. Debendranath, Keshavchandra Sen, Shivnath Sastri, Bipin Chandra Pal, Anandamohan Bose – a number of inspired leaders strengthened the bond in spite of differences in opinion.

Maharshi Debendranath was a young boy when he first came in contact with Rammohun who was a close friend of Dwarkanath. In the course of time he recollected his association with the great man whose spiritual ideas now touched him deeply. The Vedas captured his soul. Intensely religious, soaked in divine love, Debendranath revived the faith. As a child he almost adored Rammohun. As an adult he propagated the great reformer's message. Maharshi took the lead to reopen the Brahmo Samaj. The Tattabodhini Sabha which he organized was a meeting place for men interested in religious discussions. The articles in the *Tatta-*

bodhini Patrika inspired many young liberals who later took up a series of reforms to give special status to women. Rajnarain Basu, Akshoy Kumar Datta and Ishwarchandra were well-known for their contributions to the *Tattabodhini*. When Vidyasagar had fought fiercely for the Widow-remarriage Bill, the Young Bengal gave him full support. The Brahmo Samaj was always in favour of progressive reforms. From 1846 the Brahmo Samaj members started embracing the Vedic faith. The younger members of course decided to question the validity of the Vedas and was against a few old-fashioned ideas. A group of radical members of the Samaj agitated against the infallibility of the Vedas. They were under the influence of Akshoy Kumar Dutta, a powerful writer, a serious thinker and a quiet intellectual. The Vedas were no longer considered infallible as the radical members started investigating the later interpretations. Debendranath, under the influence of Akshoy Kumar Datta, was prepared to make a thorough research of the scriptures. Sanskrit scholars and pandits were consulted and sent to Benaras; they pointed out that the scriptures were fallible to the extent that the laymen were allowed to add remarks and comments. So the later compilation could not be infallible. A thorough investigation proved that a few changes were imperative. The radical thinkers drew a large number of youth. *The Brahmo Dharma*, a new compilation of Vedic verses, edited by Maharshi Debendranath was a valuable contribution. It became the prayer book for the Samaj. Rabindranath translated several

Vedic verses into melodious hymns. *The Brahma Sangit* which Rammohun had initially collected for the prayer services, now became the most precious book of devotional songs. The English translations of *Gitanjali* (A collection of Tagore's devotional songs) captured the attention of foreign readers. Rammohun's songs which were the first hymns expressed solid faith, almost ascetic in mood. They were based on solemn classical tunes. His hymns are highly philosophical, sometimes wordy, but they bear a spirit of complete self-surrender. The amount of writing Rammohun had done in Bengali, English, Urdu and Hindusthani, is most astonishing. He was indeed versatile. Languages like Arabic, Persian, Greek and Hebrew attracted him. He learnt elementary Latin and French.

The significance of Rammohun Roy's visit to England can hardly be overstated. It was in a sense the continuation of the gigantic task undertaken by him in his native soil. The culmination of the multifarious campaigns ended like a drama in which the country was divided into two positive camps—the liberals and the conservatives. But the ideology of "Liberty" echoed in every heart yearning for progress. Rammohun's arrival in England changed the attitude of the Company officials who had encountered him in India in times of agitation. They knew him as a rebel, a reformer and a liberal. Now that Rammohun was received cordially by the British intellectuals, the officials who had been critical of him showed a special keenness to be near him. A vision of Eastern enlightenment captured their admiration. Rammohun's striking personality, polished manners, and refined conversation created much flutter amongst the fashionable ladies interested in holding some of the distinguished salons. Rammohun was filled with cordiality and goodwill.

The main object of Rammohun's visit to England was three-fold. Firstly, he wanted to submit a memorandum to the King of Great Britain on behalf of Akbar the Second, the then Emperor of Delhi; secondly, to present a memorial to the House of Commons for the Abolition of Suttee; and thirdly, to be present in England during the proceedings of the House of Commons on renewal of the Charter. Further the Reform Bill which was coming up in 1832 was a matter of particular interest to him. Politically, Rammohun was not a dreamer. He was conscious of India's prestige at home and abroad, and believed that any change in the political climate in Europe was sure to have an impact on India. Whatever political events should take place in Europe would affect the outlook of his people. A universal man could think in no other way. The sufferings of the people in any part of the world would concern him, naturally he had a broad vision in politics. The Divine that is spaceless and timeless gave him infinite spiritual strength to visualize the beauty of a free soul. He was an optimist in every way.

Rammohun set sail on 19 November 1830 by the steamer *Albion*. He was accompanied by his adopted son, Rajaram, two personal attendants, Ramratan Mukhopadhaya and Ramhoree Dass. Mr. James Sutherland happened to be on the same boat. Sutherland's reporting on the voyage brought out several interesting details which, however insignificant, give a glimpse of the sojourn. The sea was rough. Ramratan and Ramhoree were extremely sea sick, but Rammohun took the voyage very well. He made friends with the fellow passengers. Every man working on the boat was attracted towards him, each wanting to serve him in some capacity.

All through the voyage, however, Rammohun was thinking of the prospects of the Reform Bill. He was waiting to hear about the changes taking place and managed to get newspapers giving the latest news. In the midst of his seafaring, a French vessel was seen to be crossing the ocean. The tricolour flag floated high; Rammohun was so excited to see the French flag that he waved at the passengers and the crew. Although he had a lame foot due to a nasty accident while climbing down the ladder, Rammohun was taken to the French boat. "Glory, glory, glory to France," he repeated with passionate enthusiasm, and greeted the occupants. He conveyed through interpreters his impregnable faith in justice. The crew reciprocated his feelings with cordiality. Rammohun spent a couple of hours at Cape Town.

Immediately after his arrival in Liverpool, the Raja was invited by Mr. William Rathbone to take up residence at his house "Greenbank." But Rammohun preferred to be on his own and went to a hotel. All through his stay, Rammohun was busy talking to the distinguished residents who took great interest in the Indian visitor. Rammohun was fluent and fiery, his conversation centred round either politics or theology. He was out morning, afternoon and evening. These hectic days were making him physically tired, but his heart was filled with joy. For many years William Roscoe was an ardent admirer of Rammohun whose work he admired greatly. It was mutual admiration. Rammohun also had deep appreciation of Roscoe's contributions. The famous historian of Medicis was eagerly awaiting Rammohun's arrival, although he was afflicted by paralysis, and was bed-ridden. He sent his son to invite his Indian friend to his own home. A parcel of books which Roscoe had sent as a gift to Rammohun reached India after Rammohun had left for Europe. But he mentioned it to Roscoe with deep gratitude. The meeting of the two scholars was touching. Rammohun greeted Roscoe warmly and said: "Happy and proud am I to behold a man whose fame has extended not only over Europe but over my part of the world." Roscoe made every effort to express his joy. "I am grateful to God" he said, "that I have been permitted to live and see this day." It was at Roscoe's house that Rammohun met some of the most distinguished scholars who were charmed with Rammohun's elegance and humility. Mrs. Roscoe made Rammohun feel at home. Having lived a full life, Roscoe died within a few days. William Rathbone introduced the Indian scholar to the famous phrenologist Supzhaim, whose strange theories amused Rammohun. The two places he rushed to were the Unitarian and the Anglican Churches where he attended the services.

A number of Unitarian families gradually became closer to him, specially the Estlins, Carpenters and the Foxes. Rev. W. J. Fox, the Editor of the monthly *Repository,* was a friend and patron of the poet Robert Browning. The impression the Bengali Brahmin made in the drawing rooms of the Liverpool magnates is given in brief by Miss Collet:

> To hear a Brahmin zealously advocating Reform, to find him quoting text after text with the utmost facility and proving himself more familiar with their sacred books than themselves. . . .

Her spontaneous comments express her deep admiration for Rammohun.

The ovation given to him by the workmen, women and children in Manchester was overwhelming. The Raja had gone to visit the factories when the workmen rushed out to greet "the King of Ingee." Rammohun addressed the crowd and hoped they would all support the King and the Ministers in obtaining Reform. "The King and Reform for ever," replied the crowd warmly. The two Quaker families who became close to him were the Croppers and Bensons with whom he discussed politics and religion freely but intensely. No amount of entertaining helped him forget the Reform Bill. All through his stay in Liverpool, Rammohun was pre-occupied with one thought—the successful passage of the Reform Bill.

On the way to London, Rammohun was enthralled by the neatness of the suburbs, the rail-roads, the facilities provided for the man in the street. It made him feel how neglected his own countrymen were, and he was convinced that India could progress with the help of the Liberals. He arrived in London so tired and late that he turned into bed early. The same evening Jeremy Bentham visited him and found that his friend had already retired to bed. He left a note expressing his affection. Genuine affection and mutual admiration had grown between the two scholars from years of correspondence, some of which are preserved in the British Museum. Bentham gave much thought to the affairs of India and when Rammohun came to England, he advocated his election to Parliament.

Apart from meeting the scholars, the Raja was introduced to a few distinguished ladies like Fanny Kemble and the Dowager Duchess of Cork. Fanny Kemble, the famous English actress has left on record appreciative reminiscences of her meeting with the Raja. They met at Mr. Basil Montague's house where Miss Kemble mentioned the merits of Hindi drama. Rammohun pointed out that he would like her to read *Shakuntala* which he thought was a remarkable play. He mentioned that Goethe had referred to *Shakuntala* as a rare proof of human genius. Rammohun took the trouble to get a translation of Sir William Jones, but Miss Kemble did not fully appreciate the merit of the play. Miss Kemble's performance in *Isabella* was touching. Rammohun sitting in the Duke of Devonshire's box was weeping with emotion. Fanny Kemble writes in her diary about Rammohun: "His countenance, besides being very intellectual, has an expression of great sweetness and benignity."

When Rammohun took his residence at 123 Regent Street, Sandford Arnot was appointed his secretary. The Dowager Duchess of Cork, whose salon was usually crowded with the most eminent intellectuals, introduced Rammohun to several Whigs and Tories. The stranger asked the Tories why they were taking a wrong view of the Reform Bill. He criticized them openly. But they did not take offence. In fact they were impressed by his sincerity and brilliance. They expressed nothing but deep cordiality. Both the parties showed equal interest in him.

Arnot's wrong advice put Rammohun into great difficulty. The Regent Street residence was far too luxurious and expensive. Rammohun had to leave it in a short time. David Hare's brother invited Rammohun to occupy his apartment in 48, Bedford Square where he continued to live all through his stay in London. A grand dinner was given in his honour by the Unitarian members of the Church, which was attended by distinguished men.

On 6 July 1831, a dinner was given in his honour by the East India Company at the City of London Tavern. The Chairman of the East India Company presided and proposed a toast, complimenting Rammohun for his services rendered to the Indian community. In reply Rammohun expressed his appreciation of the competency of certain governor-generals, specially Lord William Bentinck. His life in London was becoming busier every day, but he tried to keep cheerful and responsive, actually exerting himself to the maximum. The English intellectuals enjoyed his company and their ideas about India changed a great deal.

The Duke of Cumberland, the brother of King of England, introduced Rammohun to the House of Lords and it was felt that the Raja's persuasion changed the views of the Tories with regard to the Reform Bill. Lord Brougham, the champion of the Abolition of Slavery, was also a supporter of popular education. He naturally became very close to Rammohun. At the coronation of William IV, Rammohun was assigned a seat along with the ambassadors of Europe. The Royal Asiatic Society of London invited him at the annual general meeting, where he proposed a vote of thanks to Henry Thomas Colebrooke, the famous Orientalist. Rammohun's meeting with Robert Owen was an important event. But their discussions led to a serious controversy specially when Owen tried to win over Rammohun to his side. It was expected that Rammohun would appreciate the merits of socialism which he did. But he could not accept the socialist philosophy fully. Rammohun felt that the workmen and labourers needed moral and spiritual stimulation. Later, when Rammohun wrote to Owen's son, he admitted that the socialistic programme would help "in promoting the social, domestic and political welfare of mankind."

The Select Committee of the House of Commons invited Rammohun to appear before it which he declined but tendered his evidence in the form of successive "communications to the Board of Control." Besides being published in the Blue Books, they were published by him in a separate volume, *Exposition of the Practical Operation of the Judicial and Revenue Systems of India, and of the General Character and Conditions of its Native Inhabitants as Submitted in Evidence to the Authorities in England.*"

The first of these evidences was dated August 1831 which dealt with revenue. Rammohun appears as the champion of the rent-racked ryot or cultivator. He felt that the Permanent Settlement of 1793 brought prosperity to the zamindars but the peasant's condition was reduced to a state of poverty and deprivation. He suggested a reduction in the revenue demanded from the zamindars so as to ensure a reduction of the ryot's rent. The total decrease in revenue could be met by increasing taxes on luxury goods; or by employing natives as collectors who would demand a lower salary. The high-salaried Europeans could therefore be dispensed with.

Among the principal measures he advocated were the substitution of English for Persian as the official language for the Court of Law; appointment of native assessors in the Civil Courts; trial by jury of which the Panchayat system was the native parallel; separation of the office of Judge and Revenue Commissioner; separation of judge and magistrate; codification of the Criminal Law and also the Civil Law of India; and consultation with the local magnates before enacting laws.

Rammohun arrived in England when people were much agitated about the Reform Bill. The First Bill was defeated in the Committee stage in March

1831. This led to the dissolution of the Parliament. The Second Reform Bill was passed by the House of Commons but rejected by the House of Lords in October. The Third Reform Bill was again placed before the House of Commons and was passed by it. Now, it was in the hands of the House of Lords. The people of England could hardly bear the suspense. The popular pressure could not be ignored. The Bill was finally passed in June 1832. Similar methods were followed in Ireland and Scotland. Rammohun had not waited in vain, he wrote to William Rathbone expressing his personal emotions:

> The nation can no longer be a prey of the few who used to fill their purses at the expense, nay, to the ruin of the people.... Thank Heaven, I can now feel proud of being one of your fellow subjects and heartily rejoice that I have the infinite happiness of witnessing the salvation of the nation, nay, of the whole world.

The Raja's presence in London goes down in history, for India's case was most ably placed before the English people by India's first ambassador to England. He was loved and respected by all the people he met. The Company Government gradually recognized the title given to Rammohun by the King of Delhi, and finally accepted him as the representative of the Indian people. Rammohun was granted an audience by King William IV on 7 September 1831 and was invited to a banquet by the King on the occasion of the opening of the London

Bridge. The cordiality and warmth offered to Rammohun by the King made his visit a unique success. At a reception given by the Unitarian Association, Dr. John Bowring, the biographer of Jeremy Bentham, welcomed Rammohun with a remarkable statement:

> I recollect some writers have indulged themselves with enquiry what they should feel if any of those time-honoured men whose names have lived through the vicissitudes of ages, should appear among them. They have endeavoured to imagine what would be their sensations if Plato or Socrates or Milton or Newton were unexpectedly to honour them with their presence. . .it was with feeling such as they underwent that I was overwhelmed when I stretched out in your name the hand of welcome to Raja Rammohun Roy.

Jeremy Bentham was present on this occasion. Dr. Kirkland, the ex-President of Harvard University, said: "The Raja is an object of lively interest in America, and he was expected there with great anxiety." The Rev. W. J. Fox also paid a glowing tribute to the Indian scholar. Rammohun was deeply touched. In his reply, he said:

> There is a battle going on between Reason and Scriptures, commonsense and wealth, power and prejudice. . . . These three have been struggling with the other three but I am convinced that your success sooner or later is certain. . . . Hon-

> our that you have from time to time conferred on me. . . I shall never forget to the last moment of my existence.

We are familiar with the fact that the War of American Independence and the French Revolution both had a serious impact on the Raja. His admiration for the French people was intense; he was considerably inspired by the ideas of the French Revolution.

D'costa, the editor of the *Calcutta Times*, had sent to Abbe Gregoire, Bishop of Blois, some of Rammohun's philosophical writings. The European intellectual circle became acquainted with his works. They knew that the Raja had a passion for freedom. In a brochure on Rammohun the Bishop paid a rare tribute to him. He stated that the force of Rammohun's arguments and his profound knowledge of the sacred books of the Hindus were proof of his fitness for the tasks he had undertaken; and that the pecuniary sacrifices he had made were signs of selflessness, a great example to others. On 5 July 1824, M. Klaproth, on behalf of Societe Asiatique Commission, made a report on the literary titles of Rammohun Roy and proposed his name as an Associate-Correspondent. An honorary diploma of the Societe Asiatique was presented to him. Sismandi described Rammohun as one of the most virtuous and enlightened of men from India. He valued Rammohun's effort to restore monotheism. Monsieur Pautheir published an article in Paris which was mainly a discussion of Rammohun's works. The Raja had an audience with the King of France on 14 October 1832. The eminent French scholar, Garcin de Tassy, had apparently known Rammohun for a long time through correspondence. He mentions having received some precious letters from Rammohun both in Hindusthani and English. Victor Jacquemont the French naturalist and traveller was responsible for introducing Rammohun to the French people. He had met Rammohun in Calcutta and records the conversation with the Indian scholar in 1829.

Rammohun's visit to France was short, but overflowing with felicitations. Before returning to London he was physically exhausted, but a very happy man. His visit to other parts of the Continent did not materialize. He wrote to Mr. Woodford on 31 August 1833;

> "I was detained in France too late to proceed to Italy last year....I thought I would not avail myself of my travels through Italy and Austria ....I have been studying French with a French gentleman who accompanied me to London and is now living with me.

Having studied Arabic, Persian, Sanskrit, English, Hebrew and Greek, his thirst for knowledge was still not satisfied. He wanted to get more acquainted with Latin and French. It is interesting to note how he craved for new experiments in the world of theology and politics when he was nearing sixty. Physically spent, Rammohun eagerly waited to see that the purpose of his visit was at least partially fulfilled. The Court of Directors sanctioned an increment in the annual stipend of the Emperor of Delhi by three lakhs of rupees. The Raja had the pleasure of witnessing the final blow administered to those who were trying to repeal the Abolition Act. The case brought before the Imperial authorities was rejected on 11 July 1833. The Report of the special committee dealing with the renewal of the East India Company's Charter was completed and presented to Parliament in August 1832. After the recommendations were agreed upon, it was drafted as a Bill and presented to the House of Commons.

He was now looking forward to a change in Bristol. He writes to Miss Mary Carpenter on 16 August: "Dear Madam, I have now the pleasure of informing you that I feel relieved and will proceed to Stapleton Grove on Thursday next."

The East India Bill received the Royal Assent on 20 August. The renewed Charter legalized the transition of the Indian Government from a trading company to an Empire. It is easy to understand Rammohun's standpoint when he said that a mere commercial organization should not rule a country and that the representatives of the native population should have the privilege to deal with a proper Government, even if it had to be a foreign one.

The Reform Bill however did not fulfil the demands of the wage-earners. This gave rise to the trade union movement of which Robert Owen was the founder. Rammohun expressed in his letter to Mr. Woodford that he was disappointed to a great extent with the activities of the reformed

Parliament. He also mentioned Sir Henry Strachey who he thought was an extraordinary man, a sound philosopher and excellent conversationalist.

In the last days of his life, dark clouds were gathering fast, he had lost his peace of mind. At the end of his chequered life, pecuniary anxieties were causing his physical ailment. The number of legal cases he had to fight, first to defend himself and then his son who was accused of misappropriation of money practically ruined him financially and physically. The dynamic soul so inspired with endless idealistic thoughts was hardly tuned to the materialistic chicanery frequently practised by men like the Maharaja of Burdwan and his type. When it was proved that the cases brought against him and his son were false allegations, Rammohun had the consolation that truth would surely overpower evil. How bravely he had taken his adversity is indeed amazing! Struggling with mental fatigue and ill-health, he spent his last days amongst foreigners who, although devoted to him, felt his awkwardness. Rammohun was practically insolvent, which hurt his pride. The failure of the Banking House of Messrs. Mackintosh and Co. (his Calcutta agents) and Richards Mackintosh and Coy (his London agents) left him in indigence and an encumbrance on a foreign country. Rammohun's son due to his own difficulties also failed to send his father's allowance.

Having been acquainted with the distinguished men and the affluent elite, his obligations to keep up a social life became a necessity. But he gradually gave up most of it. At the end, a few very close friends kept him company. Sandford Arnot proved to be a mean character. Taking advantage of the tragic situation, Arnot, who had worked as Rammohun's secretary, threatened to blackmail him with his writings. This was another rude shock. Arnot had intentions of exploiting Rammohun. He had no love, no scruples. Miss Collet refers to him as a parasite with no integrity. The Raja was too worried, his health soon became a matter of concern.

Early in September, Rammohun arrived at Stapleton Grove on the outskirts of Bristol, the hospitable home of Miss Kiddel and Miss Castle, where Rajaram was being educated. The two servants, Ramratan and Ramhoree went along with him. David Hare's sister Miss Hare joined them. Dr. Lant Carpenter, Paster of Bristol's Lewin's Mead Chapel was already residing in Bristol. Mr. Estlin, Rammohun's medical adviser, was a devoted friend and admirer. A severe headache and high fever took hold of the Raja. He was being nursed by Miss Hare, and with what noble devotion! Despite all medical attention offered by a number of eminent physicians, his condition deteriorated. Dr. Estlin writes in his memoirs:

> "It was a beautiful moonlight night, on one side of the window, as Mr. Hare, Miss Kiddel, and I looked out of it, was the calm rural midnight scene, on the other, this extraordinary man dying. I shall never forget the moment. Miss Hare, now hopeless and overcome, could not summon courage to hang over the dying Raja as she

> did while soothing or feeding him, hope had left her, and she remained sobbing in the chair near by; the young Raja (Rajaram) was generally holding his hand.... At half-past two Mr. Hare came into my room and told me it was all over. His last breath was drawn at 2.25. This was on 27 September 1833.

Several years after, Dwarkanath Tagore, a devoted friend and disciple of Rammohun, arrived in England in 1842. He had the coffin removed from Staple Grove to Arno's Vale, the cemetry on the outskirts of Bristol. Rammohun's remains were interred on 29 May 1843. A beautiful structure in Indian style was erected over it.

Rammohun's hymns which were a source of consolation to many must have crossed his mind several times before he breathed his last. Quoting from a significant one:

> Meditate on the Only One
> Who pervades land, water and air,
> Who has created this Universe of which there
> is no bound,
> He knows all, but none know Him
> He is Lord of Lords, the God of Gods and the
> Master of Masters.
> Let us know, this Adorable One.

Bearing eternal peace he was completely oblivious of the great burden he had borne happily on this earth.

TEN

ANECDOTES : RAMMOHUN THE HUMANIST

> *"Can I see another's woe*
> *And not be in sorrow too."*
>
> —BLAKE

THE NIGHT was particularly cold, damp and gloomy. The roads were almost deserted. Piercing calls of jackals echoed at intervals. Stray dogs barked from sheer insecurity. Swarms of mosquitoes pestered the passersby walking in haste. The men were returning to their huts clustered inside a stinking slum silhouetted against a starless sky. After a hard day's work, a group of half-clad men were rushing through a dark lane, their faces drawn with exhaustion. Calcutta in those days had numerous by-lanes shooting out from the rough roads. The men silently glided through the mysterious shortcuts, with empty baskets dangling in their hands. Their bodies were soaked with perspiration in spite of the sharp breeze blowing. A tall stately figure followed them. The poor men heard the footsteps and started running in fear. They tried to avoid the intrusion of a nobleman. One of them watched him in silence. The monstrous open drains occupying the two sides of the road gaped at them. The accumulated garbage emitted a bad odour. In the muddy water which poured out from the corners of the open trench floated broken rag dolls, dry petals and leftover food. Only the poor were out in the open, the wealthy citizens never stirred out on the roads after dusk. But a solitary stranger paced up and down.

"Brothers!" the restless pedestrian addressed the *mutias* (the coolies). They looked up and stopped. Their eyes fell on an elegantly dressed man whose face was soft, but lustrous. His eyes filled with ineffable kindness. The labourers did not have the courage to ask him any questions for fear of offending the aristocrat. They remained silent until the gentleman with dark bobbed hair, and a long *choga* and *chabkan* spoke in a friendly voice, "Can you tell me how many *mutias* are there in this city? Where do you live? How much do you earn every day ? How many hours do you work here during the day ?" Having heard him, one of the *mutias* laughed. "Is he crazy ?" he whispered. "No one has enquired about us in this manner !" He said, "Why does he want to know so much about people like us? Strange is he not ?" The other *Mutias* sat down at the corner of the road, and watched him with curiosity. "Come on silly fellow," called out one of them to a friend, "our wives will be worried. They will think we have been killed by our masters." Although a bit suspicious at heart, the rustic men also felt close to the new-found passerby. They shared a smoke amongst themselves. Gradually they unburdened their daily problems, as if speaking to a friend. The man so humble and warm could do no harm, they agreed. In a few minutes they were talking freely with him. The *mutias* were used to being bullied. Why this genteel wanderer asked them so many questions—they still wondered. But they did not mind their delay. Did they find a friend from amongst the zamindars? This conversation throws light on the human aspect of Rammohun's character which is unknown to most of us.

* * *

Rammohun was visited by various types of people. A gentleman who came to him frequently was fond of listening to Rammohun's discourses. But he was very, very poor. Gradually he stopped calling on him. When Rammohun enquired about him, he was told that the friend hesitated to see him as he did not have proper clothes to wear. After a long interval, the gentleman appeared once again and this time in clean clothes. Rammohun was delighted to see him. He said, "Remember friend, I don't judge a man by what he wears!" The admirer blushed, but felt relieved. He continued to visit Rammohun regularly as usual even when he could not always wear clean clothes.

* * *

Prasanna Kumar Tagore was a close associate of Rammohun although he was to a certain extent a sceptic as to evangelical pursuits. He argued with Rammohun constantly but always in good humour. Rammohun started addressing him, "A rustic philosopher."

* * *

When Ramprasad heard that his father was leaving for England, he broke down and wept aloud. "Why do you have to leave us and go to a distant land?" he sobbed. Rammohun rebuked his son. "You are a man, how can you weep in this way?" he said, and controlled his own emotions rapidly.

* * *

The spirit of independence with which Rammohun conducted his duties made him different from most of his contemporaries. His faith in Hindu Unitarianism was often misinterpreted. He was averse to idolatry in Hinduism. Very few people understood his religious views. Whenever he visited Bishop Middleton there was a free exchange of ideas between them. In the course of their conversation one day the Bishop suggested that Rammohun could easily gain more prestige and power if he embraced Christianity. Rammohun was shocked. He felt so indignant that he left the Bishop's house in a few minutes and never saw him again. But he had other good friends from amongst the missionaries. Rammohun felt deeply humiliated as he had never expected the Bishop to speak in this tone. He was disillusioned, and expressed openly his contempt for such behaviour.

* * *

Whether Rammohun had real faith in Brahman (The Supreme Being) was a matter of curiosity with many ignorant critics. Bhabani Datta and his friend Nilmoni conspired to put Rammohun to a test. They forged a letter in which it was written that Rammohun's son Radhaprasad had died suddenly. What a cruel game! Having hired a messenger, the friends sent a letter to Rammohun. Bhabanicharan and Nilmoni kept sitting in front of him while the note was being delivered. When Rammohun read the letter his face became pale with deep sorrow. His suffering was reflected on his face. But he controlled his emotions and recovered in a few seconds. With great determination he continued to work as usual. The two merciless men felt thoroughly ashamed of themselves. Looking at Rammohun's sad but composed face they realized how cruel they had been. They fell on his feet and confessed their guilt, their conspiracy and their folly.

* * *

Rammohun during his adolescent years was forced into three marriages. Two of his wives survived. He was naturally against polygamy and child marriage. An admirer of his, Nandakishore Basu was shown a beautiful and fair girl whom he agreed to marry. At the time of his marriage a particularly dark girl was produced as the bride. Nandakishore having to marry the dark girl became revengeful. He wanted to marry again merely to take revenge on his father-in-law. Rammohun heard about this and was perturbed. He went to Nandakishore and implored not to take another wife. "What does it matter if your wife is not a beautiful woman?" he remarked. "If she delivers a worthy son, you should consider your wife a beautiful woman." The son born to Nandakishore was Rajnarain Basu who later became distinguished as a man of letters, and a leader amongst the enlightened reformers.

* * *

Rammohun's daily life was marked by insignificant incidents which may have been overlooked by many, but remembered by a handful of admirers. As he was a large-hearted zamindar, he could not tolerate any meanness shown by most of his wealthy associates. Some of his own relatives even proved to be hard-hearted when it came to the question of the under-privileged. In his village town, Rammohun owned a market where buying and selling went on in full swing. According to the tradition, a cess was charged from the stall holders when they came to the market. Radhaprasad used to collect the taxes from the poor hawkers coming to sell their commodities. The impoverished shopkeepers one day related their misery to Rammohun. He was pained. Showing his indignation to his son he said, "How can you exploit such poor people who come here to sell their meagre stock? Are you not harassing them?" The system of taxing the hawkers was abolished from the next day.

* * *

Rommohun was sometimes seen strolling on the roads leading to the bazaar. A hawker carrying a very heavy basket nearly dropped it on the road. When he was struggling with the load, Rammohun came running to him and restored the basket on his head.

* * *

Apart from his sharp wit, Rammohun also had a quiet sense of humour. He was fond of children and played with them at leisure hours. A good many of them came to his beautifully laid-out garden and played on the swing. From time to time he would sit on the swing while the other boys pushed it from the back. One day, when he was in his playful mood with the boys, a grim-looking friend of Rammohun came to visit him. Casting an inquisitive eye on Rammohun the pompous gentleman stood there gaping at his friend. Rammohun glanced at the visitor and said, "I have a desire to visit foreign lands, and shall have to travel by ship. The steamer rolls in this way when the sea is rough. I am getting used to it, it is good to be on the swing and have some idea."

* * *

There was a constant flow of visitors to Rammohun's house. Kalinath Munshi, a distinguished resident of Taki, often consulted Rammohun on personal matters. Once a hawker went to Kalinath's house to sell a conch which, according to him, could fulfil all the material wants of the man who owned the conch. The pedler asked for Rs. 500, and Kalinath was willing to pay the price. But Kalinath wanted Rammohun's advice before parting with the big sum. He took the hawker to Rammohun's house and praised the qualities of the conch. Rammohun listened to him attentively. "If you can purchase all your world's possessions with Rs. 500, the conch must be really a piece of marvel;" commented Rammohun. "But how is that the seller of the conch is willing to part with the immortal Laxmi? Is his Goddess who fullfils all the worldly desires of a man worth only Rs. 500?" Kalinath realized his folly. The man with the magic conch quickly disappeared from the house the moment he heard Rammohun's remarks.

* * *

A Brahmin usually complained that he never had enough flowers for his offerings. Dwarkanath advised him to visit Rammohun's garden which was always full of flowers. The Brahmin took offence. He said, "Such an outcaste is Rammohun! How can you expect me to enter his garden and collect flowers for the diety?" Dwarkanath ignored his rude comments and pursuaded him once again to visit the beautiful garden. The Brahmin agreed at last.

Only in one particular spot, people were forbidden to touch the flowers. The Brahmin proceeded unknowingly to that very spot. Naturally, he was stopped by the gardener. The Brahmin snapped at the gardener. "That I have visited Rammohun's garden is the sinner's rare privilege. He should consider himself lucky. How can you stop me ?" It so happened that Rammohun was standing nearby and overheard from behind what the Brahmin uttered with anger. "Why my Lord ?" said Rammohun to the Brahmin priest. "Why are you so angry? Explain why you think I have forsaken my religion." The Brahmin and Rammohun soon entered into a violent controversy which continued for hours. Both remained hungry the whole day. The Brahmin realized at last what little knowledge he had. He fell on Rammohun's feet. The humble scholar immediately held the Brahmin's hands and took him inside his house. Both of them had a sumptuous meal together. To Rammohun, an academic discussion could never be a matter of bitterness. His humility cured the Brahmin's false vanity.

* * *

During the campaign against Suttee, Rammohun was warned by a group of friends that he might be manhandled by his enemies, if he was not cautious. "Who did you say would overpower me?" asked Rammohun to his friends. "The residents of Calcutta ?" he laughed. "What do they eat? They are so impoverished ! What harm can they do ?

I am not scared of them."

* * *

Faith in humanity was one of Rammohun's natural instincts. As a devotee he could never be vindictive towards any one. He was often condemned for establishing the Brahmo Samaj. Gurudas Mukhopadhaya, Rammohun's nephew, was the first amongst his relatives to join the Brahmo Sabha. Gurudas came to know that a critic of Rammohun had composed a vulgar song ridiculing his uncle. Gurudas was ready to take revenge on the stranger. Rammohun heard the story and sent for Gurudas. "You see, Gurudas," he said, "the British have conquered India after crossing a series of hurdles. They have also gone through much suffering in order to gain supremacy over us. Suffering leads one to a path of victory. Danger sometimes helps us regain courage. It is easy to cross a brightly lit-up path, but it is a test when one has to struggle in darkness. If after that he reaches his goal, he is a worthy man. Let people say what they like, why lend your ears to their useless talk? We must remain steady, follow the straight path." Gurudas was impressed, and touched. He gave up the idea of taking revenge on the man.

From Maharshi Debendranath Tagore's autobiography we get a vivid picture of Rammohun's affection for children.

Maharshi mentions that as a child he used to spend long hours in Rammohun's garden full of fruit trees. He plucked litchis and other fruits and often damaged some other trees in the process. Rammohun saw him from far and took him inside the house. He ordered the gardener to bring huge quantities of litchis and offered them all to Maharshi and his friends. Very plainly he told them that they should not struggle or plunder, but ask for any numbers of the fruit which they wanted to eat. That day Maharshi ate as many litchis as he could. Before leaving for England, Rammohun came to take leave of Dwarkanath and shook hands with Debendranath. He said a few words which rang in his ears for days. Debendranath was amazed at his own unique experience when some years later he found inspiration to revive the Brahmo Samaj established by Rammohun.

ELEVEN

IMPACT ON POSTERITY

> *"Not farewell, fare forward,*
> *voyager."*
> —ELIOT

The image of Rammohun Roy as a reformer has not perhaps captured the attention of the man in the street as he believed in influencing the educated first, and then introducing changes through their rational leadership. This is the story of the path-finder who has struggled through darkness and shadow but retained his optimism and hope. The chaotic India that he encountered at that period consisted of Hindu, Muslim and Christian population, each condemning the other. He strove to bring a sort of co-existence which was the basic thing necessary for any sane civilization. Bengal had faced a similar crisis during the fifteenth century when Chaitanya as a selfless devotee united the Hindus and Muslims, the Brahmins and the outcastes. After his death a long period of stagnation had engulfed the country. Meanwhile, the East India Company had made its presence felt. Bengal was thrown into a greater conflict since the well-organized Christian Mission landed with philanthropic-cum-evangelical aspirations. Stability being totally absent, fanaticism spread in every sphere. The complacent masses did not try to rise from its inertia as it needed leadership. British Orientalists having opened the colleges for recruits of British Civil Service incidentally made the Brahmin priest feel his worth and superiority. The Sanskrit pandits with their orthodox background suddenly felt their indispensibility, but they were really not close to the foreign intellectuals in spirit. Their communication was on such a superficial level that the Bengali scholars who worked with the Orientalists or Missionaries did not want to rise above the traditional ladder laid down by their predecessors. That suited the Baptist Missionaries as well as the East India Company, for the British felt that an inquisitive subject was at all times a source of danger to the stability of the British power in India. When Rammohun appeared on the scene, he started to think on different lines. He wanted to see that his countrymen were treated with respect, and what they needed was a sense of security. He was not a blind admirer of the British nor a blind devotee of the Brahmin priest. The first man to emphasize rational human relationship was Rammohun, so naturally he was suspected of having some personal motive. When Rammohun expressed his new ideas the society reacted strongly. People could hardly distinguish between rationalism and bigotry. Both, the British traders and the timid subjects criticized Rammohun's observations. Nevertheless, the unprecedented crusade started by him changed the entire picture. The perseverence and tenacity he needed for this task is almost unthinkable!

In comparison with the West, India has not taken the front seat in scientific discoveries and inventions. She has been more preoccupied with cultural, literary, and spiritual pursuits. With the revival of the Vaishnava Padavali, Bengal heralded a magnificent literary renaissance. But, being overburdened with religious emotionalism, the secular movement gradually resulted in complete degeneration. All the problems that had been partially solved by Chaitanya reappeared adversely with greater discord.

The Battle of Plassey and the consequent waning of the Muhammadan rule, dealt Hindu India the hardest blow possible specially in rural Bengal. But the Bengali was never averse to acquiring knowledge. His reverence for learning and love for literature revived with the changes brought about from time to time by bards and religious sages. Music and art had also stimulated the people.

The entry of the East India Company through Bengal was inevitable, but painful in many ways. No other country has been exploited to such an extent. The Permanent Settlement (1793) left the entire province at the mercy of the landed gentry in connivance with the East India Company. As a result both the Hindu and the Muslim cultivators became victims of poverty and deprivation. The relation of the landlord with the peasant was most unhappy for decades. The landless labourers were the worst victims. One does not like to recollect the image of the emaciated "praja" forking out a gold coin, (mohor) merely to greet the landlord's son. The zamindar's wrath haunted the Muslim and the Hindu peasants, a compromise at any cost was the only thing one could think of. The affluent landlords had the benefit of acquiring education, access to luxury and entertainment. They had power over the unfortunate ones. The ignorant and under-privileged countrymen suffered from acute diffidence and a loss of identity. The country needed radical changes. But the majority could not be left to the mercy of the clannish and self-centred pillars of society. Family feuds became part of a gentleman's life, joint families lacked in genuine sentiment and concern. Land, cash, inheritance, disposing and acquiring of property were a new phenomenon. Litigation was a household word. The poor had no access to justice. A section of the wealthy middle class and zamindars came to Calcutta to get acquainted with urban life. Some succeeded in running a lucrative but petty business, some lived an idle life. Haunted by the zamindars, even peasants and unskilled labourers came to Calcutta and worked as daily wage earners. The heterogenous population in the metropolis did not show much stability although the city had become a centre of activities. A layman was most insecure about his future.

Although the Europeans who came to India had tasted the virtues of the Renaissance, they infiltrated into Indian soil with more mercenary aspirations, ultimately leading to massive plunder. The College of Fort William was expected to stimulate the studies of the British Orientalists and Civil Servant recruits and hardly had much to do with the ordinary citizen's life. The indolent bachelors of the British Civil Service had to be coaxed to work for intellectual achievements with lures of awards and prizes. With the exception of two or three brilliant products, the rest had little interest or inspiration. The British Orientalists meanwhile offered certain privileges to the Hindu traditionalists. Their methods of doling out patronage was received by some Sanskrit scholars as God's gift. With the exception of Vidyasagar most of the Indian scholars were used to following the dictatorial instructions of the Britishers on top. The library was a great attraction, but the books were lent out to foreigners only. The penetration of the East India Company was destined by history; India did not have the means to resist any foreign invaders; she was destined to become an acquisition of the British. In spite of the fact that the British had two hundred years of scientific progress, rational thinking, and advantages of the Industrial Revolution, yet what they offered to India was very different. The various British officials consisting of civil servants, judges of Supreme and High Court, lawyers, priests, physicians, journalists and technicians, undoubtedly influenced the Indian intelligentsia. But with a good deal of contradictory reaction from both the traditionalists and the progressives. Either the Anglicist and the Anglophile imitated the foreigners almost comically or the intolerant orthdox condemned all Western customs and manners. They even turned their faces on any change in the educational system. There was a marked lack of balance in the behaviour of the upper class, the aristocrats and the leaders of the society. The middle class, still suspicious of the foreigners, had hardly any sentiment or respect for the invaders. It was the opportunist that kept up the semblance of a 'toady'—flattering the immediate senior in office. But the moment he returned to his sacred home he instantly went through the process of purification – a bath in the Ganges, change of attire, and a mouthful of abuse. A small tip to the Brahmin priest could save anyone from dishonesty, adultery or slackness in work. However, to accept the Western intruder's domination with a feeling of resignation was difficult for a Bengali—an individualist by temperament and a self-opinionated orator specially if he was conscious of his education. The idea of any kind of co-operation or team work never appealed to him even if it could be necessary for improving the condition of his own country. The urban society consisted of groups thriving on personal self-interest. Rammohun was eager to break through the barrier of the countrywide prejudice against one another on various grounds. Even his worst enemy could not honestly accuse him of intolerence or abuse.

Justice and education were denied to the poor including the non-Brahmins and the lower castes until the Bengal Renaissance brought an impressive change and an all-round reformation which shook the entire country. The cross-currents are worth recollecting. The Serampore Missionaries on one hand, the Fort William College on the other; the traditionalists on one hand and the Liberals on the other. The massive but dismal horizon awaited its change in colour.

Rammohun was born in a family which had also witnessed the glaring weaknesses of the Muhammadan rulers. Nevertheless, Rammohun was given the facilities to acquire a taste for a broader education, even before he was a young adult. When he died in 1803, Ramkanto left a portion of his property to Rammohun, with which it was not impossible for Rammohun to start a business in Calcutta. From the reports of the people who worked with him it seems he had enough resources available in a city like Calcutta. A couple of Englishmen used to take loans from him. They were not only interested in him as a money-lender, but were attracted by his unique personality. Some of the educated Englishmen gradually got closer to him. He met them at the Baptist Mission and at the college of Fort William particularly with the purpose of acquiring intellectual comradeship. Yates, Carey, Ward, and Rammohun worked together. In Rammohun they found a splendid freshness and self-confidence.

Rammohun had a house in Maniktola the suburb of Calcutta, where theological discussion took place frequently. His garden house in the suburb was artistically laid out and was a meeting place of men of letters both Indian and foreign. People sought his advice as his house was open to all, rich or poor. Rammohun was familiar with the habits and behaviour of the British residents, and was interested in understanding the foreigner who happened to come into contact with him. But his Hindu contemporaries who were equally prosperous, perhaps more, could not dream of any familiarity with the *Mleccha* — an outcaste as the foreigners were referred to. In offices and other fields of work the British were shown special honour but at heart the native always bore the fear of losing his caste and purity. Some of the educated aristrocrats decorated their large mansions in the Western style, installed marble statues, and imported fabulous crystals. But their minds were closed. The orthodox bigwig practically had no other interest beyond the materialistic acquisitions, and was totally indifferent to the world outside his own citadel of ancient literature and learning. The question of reading foreign literature or classics or even showing curiosity about the foreign countries was almost unknown. The traditionalists took Rammohun's civility towards the foreigners as a strange idiosyncrasy; they neither understood his normal curiosity as a scholar nor his natural interest as an intelligent citizen.

They felt that the foreign rulers should not interfere with their social or religious life however primitive the customs might be. Where rituals and traditions were concerned they differed from Rammohun's view that they could be improvised, abolished, or changed, according to the needs of the society. Here, the traditionalist and the non-conformist disagreed seriously. Hence Rammohun was labelled an anti-Hindu. The idea of emancipating or educating women horrified the conservatives. Any contact with the world outside the Hindu dominion was marked as anti-social. The wealthy ones wallowing in their empty squirarchy objected to non-conformism in any form. They conveyed their ancient myths and fables to the younger generation as usual, and the colossal ignorance of the majority created mutual incompatibility and lack of efficiency. Young men from affluent families were allowed to dissipate with opium, women and kite-flying contests. Flimsily clad effiminate youth, and bloated "Gourmandes" were used to exhibiting wealth and pomp during puja celebrations or weddings. Some of the fashionable youth were dragged out of dens where they were given names of special birds. They were known as senior or junior birds according to the capacity for consuming *charas*. One of the unfortunate fathers who had to enter the den to detect his son was confronted by a "Katthokra" wood pecker who having recognized his father pecked him on his hand in the manner of the bird. None of his cronies knew him by any other name. The degeneration of the youth was due to the indulgence given by the fathers who were too busy making money and enjoying the blessings of a care-free existence in an irresponsible society. The banians middlemen and stooges of the foreign traders, were at least influenced by a fairly educated class, but the zamindar families did not care to reach any standard, except a show of luxury and lavish entertainment. The mothers had no right to interfere.

Rammohun felt that the Bengal gentry was actually surrounded by unreal glamour.

He interconnected the issues of social, religious and economic factors. He was fortunately supported by an influencial and loyal friend like Dwarkanath whose ample property did not ruin his sense of values or diminish his magnanimity. The Tagore family under the guidance of Dwarkanath and the Brahmo Samaj placed high values in humanistic, cultural, and educational projects.

If Vidyasagar has been recognized as Rammohun's follower as a social reformer, the poet was the best interpreter of the Upanishad revived by Rammohun and reorientated later by Debendranath. Rommohun felt an urge to bring a change in the country strewn with withered laurels. And he succeeded, to a great extent, to bring in the change. It was the concern of an intellectual to emphasize the humanitarian point of view. Here, the intellectual differs from the scholar who may acquire knowledge for the sake of recognition. But Rammohun as an intellectual felt the urge to contribute a good deal to others. That the foreigners could not all be kept at a distance as devils, nor adored as demigods, was made clear by him. His mind was always open. He was fully inclined to investigate every line of thought, old or new.

In his effort to modernize India, Rammohun was totally involved, both intellectually and spiritually. He was on the one hand drenched with sorrow and sympathy for the ignorant people and on the other aroused with a spirit of challenge. He never dismissed the good points in Indian learning. He stood for the East-West synthesis leading to a cosmopolitan, humanist culture. He aimed at a harmonized universalism. Side by side with his interest in the Western world, he upheld his own country's pride and heritage. While the other zamindars and protectors of orthodoxy rubbed shoulders with the influencial Britishers, Rammohun took the advantage of studying the Western political thought of modern liberal writers. His appointment as John Digby's Assistant Revenue officer gave him ample opportunity to learn and assimilate the English language. He made a serious effort to appreciate the qualities of the Englishman as an enlightened citizen. If he had nourished a grudge and apathy for everything foreign as anti-national, he would not have been able to uphold India in the current of World-force. He was acquainted with the events taking place in European countries: the French Revolution, the American War of Independence, the Irish Rebellion. He read about Whigs and Tories, their strength and weaknesses, their sympathies and phobias. In the course of time in later years when Rammohun was expressing his opinions freely, his sympathies were on the side of Liberals during the internal struggles of Spain. A dedication of a document to Rammohun gives an idea of great reverence shown to the Indian reformer. The Dedication page of the Spanish Constitution (1812) is reprinted in Miss Collet's *The life and letters of Raja Rammohun Roy.* When the news of the liberation of the Spanish colonies reached him, he gave a dinner to some of his friends. When the Europeans sounded him out on his political views he said, "What?

Aught I to be insensible to the sufferings of my fellow-creatures, wherever they are, or howsoever unconnected by interests, religion or language ?" It was commented by an Englishman in the *Edinburgh Magazine* in 1823. "The lively interest he took in the progress of South American emancipation eminently marks the greatness and benevolence of his mind."

The introduction of Constitutional Government in Portugal made him particularly happy. He supported the struggle for freedom of the Greeks against the Turks. In Naples, a society called Carbonari was founded in 1815. Between 1820-21 "the Neopolitan Carbonari broke out in rebellion against the Bourbon King of Naples, claiming a constitution, equality among all classes and the right of the people to decide their destiny." The revolt was crushed. When the two leaders Morelli and Silvati were hanged, Rammohun was heart-broken. He excused himself from a dinner given by Buckingham to whom he wrote:

> My mind is depressed by the late news from Europe... under these circumstances I consider the cause of the Neopolitans as my own and their enemies as ours. Enemies to liberty and friends of despotism have never been and never will be ultimately successful.

In 1822, Rammohun sharply criticized in the *Mirat* the high-handed policy of the British towards the Irish Catholics. He sent funds for the relief of the famine-stricken people of Ireland.

Rammohun never hesitated to protest against lack of mutual faith between nations. When he had applied for a passport for France, he wrote a letter to Prince Talleyrand on 26 December 1831 which explains how strongly he felt for individual freedom. He did not like the system of passport.

> Such a regulation is (he wrote) quite unknown even among the Nations of Asia....I am therefore quite at a loss to conceive how it should exist among a people so famed as the French are for courtesy and liberality in all other matters. It is now generally admitted that not religion only but unbiased commonsense as well as the accurate deductions of scientific research lead to the conclusion that all mankind are one great family of which numerous nations and tribes existing are only various branches. Hence enlightened men in all countries feel a wish to encourage and facilitate human intercourse.

A century and a half has elapsed since Rammohun's demise and we still think in terms of a General Assembly of Nations, of the United Nations as we call it. Although the world has grown much smaller since Rammohun's time, the need for international co-operation is often imperative. We are amazed how he had visualized so long ago a world organization and mentioned in the same letter to Talleyrand that the aims of constitutional government might be better attained by submitting every matter of political difference between two countries to a congress composed of an equal number of members of parliament of each. He even recommended the selection of a chairman chosen by each nation alternately for a one year duration.

"By such a Congress," he suggests, "all matters of difference whether political or commercial... might be settled amicably and justly to the satisfaction of both." We cannot help admiring his foresight and the modern conception of international co-operation. The opinion pool of world powers is just as necessary today and he spoke about it a hundred and fifty years ago.

A foreign biographer refers to Dwarkanath and Prasanna Kumar Tagore as "those two Anglicized Bengalis." In the same way the orthodox Hindu has portrayed Rammohun as an anti-Hindu, and condemned his fresh interpretation of the old scriptures. Rammohun was also blamed for supporting the cause of women. The Bengal Renaissance was surely not a one night's drama; several factors have to be taken into consideration: the factors which led to the historical evolution leading ultimately to the rise of the Indian National Movement. Colebrooke, a number of years before Rammohun, might have discovered that Suttee was not a religious rite; but did he explain to the ordinary man how cruel the custom was from the humanitarian point of view? Neither the learned Orientalists nor the Anglophiles or the Anglicists took the responsibility of creating public opinion against it. It was only the progressive liberals who understood why Rammohun decided to propagate against all social persecutions. Even the British Governor-

Generals refused to take the responsibility. Their reluctance and timidity was nothing but fear of unpopularity.

Bentinck arrived with an open mind and found the Fort William College a spent force. It was not his fault if he was prejudiced against his predecessors. Could he boast of the Orientalists or the Sanskrit scholars attached to the College? There was nothing left to be admired. The Serampur College aimed at indirect conversion. The Sanskrit College was considerably influenced by the liberalism adopted by a large section of the Hindu College boys. Bentinck was naturally attracted by Rammohun and Dwarkanath and the members of the Brahma Sabha who supported the reforms with conviction. Western influence or Christianity had not engulfed the Young Bengal. The proof lay in the formation of the Brahmo Samaj. Gradually nationalism captured their attention. Universalism was no longer a theory. It was the only answer to the priest-ridden society lacking in humanism.

The revivalists like Mritiunnjaya and Radhakanto Dev claimed that there was no need for a broader system of education. Rammohun realized that the only way of emerging from darkness was to be able to stand up to the foreigners and be aware of their system of education along with our own. In fact he was the founder of the Vedanta College, and wanted that Sanskrit should be taught properly. Moreover it was in Rammohun's Anglo-Hindu school that science was taught in Bengali. The parents who showed utter contempt for a broader education, liberal thinking, or rationalism, obviously made the boys resentful against the society. The boys had curiosity about the wider world which was not open to them. Vidyasagar's father took care not to let him join the Hindu College. His son went to the Sanskrit College, almost in the same compound, and was extremely curious about the views held by the boys studying in the Hindu College. Vidyasagar was influenced by the discussions and debates and after college meets at the Hindu College. All his orthodox background provided him with a strong reaction against the cruelties practiced in the orthodox society. How did he grow up to be a social reformer? And why did he take up such a bold reform as widow-remarriage? Rammohun's ideas had great influence on him. Young Bengal was not a destructive group, but his greatest supporter.

The Tagores were accused of being over-anglicized specially after Dwarkanath started the industries in the outskirts of Calcutta. He was a pioneer in starting the shipping business, banking, and several other industrial projects which led India towards urbanization. Absolutely confident of his Hindu background, he had no fear of losing his identity with his countrymen or culture. In fact his children were brought up in an enlightened Hindu household where Europeans were treated as equals. The original idea of the Brahmo Samaj to sponsor a universal humanism was gradually taken up by Debendranath, Keshavchandra Sen, Shivnath Sastri, Anandamohan Basu, and a number of serious thinkers and liberal scholars. Their leadership awakened the already alert youth who were resisting caste segregation. In the course of time the Brahmo Samaj organizations, culminated in the Sadharan Brahmo Samaj which is the mainstream of activities. The Raja of Pithapuram in the South, Dayal Singh in North India, the Prarthana Samaj in Maharashtra took up philanthropic work as well as theological quests. Debendranath had established the Abode of Peace—Santiniketan—which was visited by friends from far and near. Mr. C. F. Andrews, Mr. Elmherst were specially close to Rabindranath who turned Santiniketan into a real international centre. The Ashram according to the poet was the *Jewel Box* presented by Debendranath who was later known as Maharshi. On the annual day of celebration people flock to the beautiful spot which has been the spiritual meeting place of several generations. During his sermons, the poet used to convey the lofty messages of the Upanishad through his song, prose and poetry. The invocation of the Universal God has appeal to visitors belonging to all religious faiths — they share the joy of knowing one another's feelings of emotion and love.

Through Dwarkanath and Rammohun's influence Debendranath was initiated into the faith of Universal humanism. The poet being a favourite son of the father had the privilege of going through the rigours of Sanskrit lessons and was gradually steeped into its richness. But he also learnt to appreciate the viewpoints of others. Bengal was still labouring under Brahmanism on the one hand, and foreign rulers on the other. The leaders had to show the path of concord. Tagore took the generous path. As a devotee of the universal God he sang the glory of humanism emphasizing the equality of man.

Bankim Chandra by then had already become the marked litterateur. He made no pretence about his conservative views and his orthodox conception of the Hindu Dharma. His views are made clear in the following dialogue:

GURU : Do you know anything about Hindu religion?
PUPIL : I am a Hindu's son, I know something.
GURU : But you are a disciple of an outcaste-foreigner–a "mleecha", you know nothing.

A dogmatic Brahmin preaching from a pedestal. After reading Tagore's *Sandhya Sangit* however the self-possessed revivalist garlanded the young poet. The young poet won the hearts of millions —a revolution was created through his literature.

Radhakanto as a leader of the revivalists had given patronage to his worthy disciples. Bankim Chandra differed from Tagore on vital issues, because he was by conviction a revivalist whereas Tagore was a devotee of a Universal God. It is not surprising that Radhakanto should differ from Rammohun.

Radhakanto Dev was not a reformer; he served the orthodox society in the best way he could by remaining attached to his traditional way of life. Rammohun's theological aspirations were accelerated when he found freedom in his studies. While the Atmiya Sabha was functioning in his house in Rangpur, Rammohun was getting acquainted with Bacon, Locke, Newton on one hand, Hume, Gibbons, Voltaire, Volney and Paine on the other. Rammohun was a voracious reader. The works of internationally known scholars provided him food for thought. Bentham and Mill had a deep impact on him. The works of Western writers brought before him the association of rationalism which he had tasted in Patna. Even in his early youth, visions of monotheism, rationalism, universalism flashed through his mind as vital truths. His formative years were spent under liberal Maulavis. The influence of the Sufis, made him appreciate mystical poems and songs. He wrote thirty-two hymns for the Brahma Sangit.

With regard to his studies in Hindu scriptures Rammohun made a serious study of Smriti, Darshana, Mimamsa, Brahmanas, Upanishads, Puranas, and Tantra. He developed a keenness in inductive logic, law and jurisprudence from studies including Quran sharif. He read the Jain and Buddhist scriptures, the Kabirpanthis, Dadupanthis, and Nanakpanthis. He was influenced by the teachings of Aristotle and Euclid which he read in Arabic. It is natural that he felt deeply for mankind and respected their individual faith. It is also true that he seldom lacked in practical sense. Among other influences, Sankaracharya's commentaries on Vedanta impressed him.

Through Greek and Hebrew he went deep into the study of Christianity and came to love Jesus as one of the most elevated of human beings. A rational devotee like Rammohun could spontaneously inspire people to think, to reason out for individual maturity, for the country and for mankind. Bengal was swept by the compelling urge of liberal thinking despite the fact that the country was divided into two camps. But the Bengali youth never looked back. He realized the relevance of constructive non-conformism. About the boys Alexander Duff had said: "The Bengali boy just before or at the age of puberty is the most earnest, acute, and lovable of all students." It was the pressure of British imperialism that had robbed the stability of the educated middle-class but the persistent struggle for freedom had made Bengal the most cosmopolitan but indefatigable of all races. The Bengal Renaissance put India squarely in the map.

Amongst the foreign scholars Max Mueller was an admirer of Rammohun and had left his rhetoric addresses as a great mark of respect. Amongst other foreigners, David Hare, Duff, Bentinck, Bentham, William Adams, Roscoe, Robert Owen, Rathbone and many others had great respect for his original thinking. Dr. Carpenter, Miss Carpenter and Miss Collet were devoted to him till the last day. They made him feel like a member of their family from the day he arrived in England.

The century was marked by the leadership of a series of brilliant men—amongst whom Vidyasagar, Sir Brojendranath Seal, Shivnath Sastri, Maharshi Debendranath, and Gurudev were deeply influenced by Rammohun's idealism. The quiet intellectuals and the radical liberals have contributed a good deal in the later years. Doubtless they were mostly inspired by Rammohun's rationalism.

A couple of centuries is a short period in history. It seems Rammohun has not only fought for his countrymen, but for the whole world.

The entire progressive world considers his reforms valid and in India they have become part of the constitution. The leaders of the Brahmo Samaj always looked beyond the Samaj and tried their best to bridge the gulf between the larger Hindu community and the Brahmo Samaj. The liberal "acharyas" spoke on different festivals of other religious organizations; on Good Friday, Janamashtami, Dol Purnima, Buddha Jayanti and so on. The talks attracted the youth who had appreciation for the secular sermons. Articles on different religious faiths were published in the journals run by the Samaj, thus encouraging a comparative study of religion. *Modern Review, Tattakaumudi* and *Prabashi* had a large circle of readers.

Rammohun's universal humanism had influenced Rabindranath deeply. Gurudev as he was addressed in Santiniketan had grasped the spirit of concord in diversity. The Vishwabharati that was established under his direct supervision welcomed pupils and admirers from every country. The Eastern cultural heritage had no conflict with the Western or any 'foreign cultural expressions; a natural harmony of the East and West led to a prolific outpour in intellectual, literary and artistic fields. The vision of a reawakening of the merger was conveyed to the world through his poem written in his inimitable style:

> Oh my heart! Wake up on India's shore of world-humanity. No one should be turned away from this shore—Hindus, Muslims, English, blend and be one. None shall leave this shore, none shall be turned back.

What prevented the degeneration two centuries ago could not remain static. For every civilization has to undergo changes. History has its inevitable earthquakes and shocks. So has imperialistic aspirations, political evaluation and human idealism. And when the time came, India threw off her shackles and attained Independence. As a member of the world community of nations, she welcomes strangers and foreigners who come to pay homage to this ancient land.

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— Rabindranath Tagore

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